THE

SERMONS

OF

Mr. YORICK.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

DUBLIN:

Printed for D. CHAMBERLAINE, J. POTTS, and
W. COLLES, Bookſellers.

M DCC LXXX.

SERMONS

BY

Laurence Sterne, M. A.

PREBENDARY of *York*, and VICAR of *Sutton* on the Forreſt, and of *Stillington* near *York*.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

SERMON VIII.

TIME and CHANCE.

ECCLESIASTES ix. 11.

I returned and ſaw under the ſun, that the race is not to the ſwift,---nor the battle to the ſtrong, ---neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill,---but time and chance happeneth to them all.

WHEN a man caſts a look upon this melancholy deſcription of the world, and ſees, contrary to all his gueſſes and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men,—how oft it happens in the world, that there is not even bread to the wiſe nor riches to men of underſtanding, *&c.*—he is apt to conclude with a ſigh upon it,—in the words,—though not in the ſenſe of the wiſe man,—that time and chance happeneth to them all.—That time and chance,—apt ſeaſons and fit conjunctures, have the greateſt ſway in the turns and diſpoſals of men's fortunes: and that, as theſe lucky hits (as they are called) happen to be for, or againſt a man,—they either open the way to his advancement againſt all obſtacles,—or block it up againſt all helps and attempts; that, as the text intimates, neither *wiſdom*, nor *underſtanding*, nor *ſkill* ſhall be able to ſurmount them.

However widely we may differ in our reaſonings upon this obſervation of Solomon's, the au-

thority of the obſervation is ſtrong beyond doubt, and the evidence given of it in all ages ſo alternately confirmed by examples and complaints, as to leave the fact itſelf unqueſtionable.—That things are carried on in this world, ſometimes ſo contrary to all our reaſonings, and the ſeeming probabilities of ſucceſs,—that, even the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong,—nay, what is ſtranger ſtill—nor yet bread to the wiſe, who ſhould laſt ſtand in want of it,—nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, who you would think beſt qualified to acquire them,—nor yet favour to men of ſkill, whoſe merit and pretences bid the faireſt for it—but that there are ſome ſecret and unſeen workings in human affairs, which baffle all our endeavours,—and turn aſide the courſe of things in ſuch a manner,—that the moſt likely cauſes diſappoint and fail of producing for us the effect which we wiſhed and naturally expected from them.

You will ſee a man, of whom, was you to form a conjecture from the appearances of things in his favour,—you would ſay was ſetting out in the world with the faireſt proſpect of making his fortune in it;—with all the advantages of birth to recommend him,—of perſonal merit to ſpeak for him,—and of friends to help and puſh him forwards: you will behold him, notwithſtanding this, diſappointed in every effect you might naturally have looked for, from them; every ſtep he takes towards his advancement, ſomething inviſible ſhall pull him back, ſome unforeſeen obſtacle ſhall riſe up perpetually in his way, and keep there.——In every application he makes,——ſome untoward circumſtance ſhall blaſt it—He ſhall riſe early,—late take reſt,—and eat the bread of carefulneſs,—yet ſome happier man ſhall

ſtill

ſtill riſe up, and ever ſtep in before him, and leave him ſtruggling to the end of his life, in the very ſame place in which he firſt begun it.

The hiſtory of a ſecond, ſhall in all reſpects be the contraſt to this. He ſhall come into the world with the moſt unpromiſing appearance,—ſhall ſet forwards without fortune, without friends,—without talents to procure him either the one or the other. Nevertheleſs, you will ſee this clouded proſpect brighten up inſenſibly, unaccountably before him; every thing preſented in his way, ſhall turn out beyond his expectations,—in ſpight of that chain of unſurmountable difficulties which firſt threatened him,—time and chance ſhall open him a way,—a ſeries of ſucceſsful occurrences ſhall lead him by the hand to the ſummit of honour and fortune, and, in a word, without giving him the pains of thinking, or the credit of projecting it, ſhall place him in ſafe poſſeſſion of all that ambition could wiſh for.

The hiſtories of the lives and fortunes of men are full of inſtances of this nature,—where favourable times, and lucky accidents, have done for them what wiſdom or ſkill could not: and there is ſcarce any one that has lived long in the world, who, upon looking backwards, will not diſcover ſuch a mixture of theſe in the many ſucceſsful turns which have happened in his life, as to leave him very little reaſon to diſpute againſt the fact, and, I ſhould hope, as little upon the concluſions to be drawn from it.

Some indeed, from a ſuperficial view of this repreſentation of things have atheiſtically inferred,—that becauſe there was ſo much of lottery in this life,—and mere caſualty ſeemed to have ſuch a ſhare in the diſpoſal of our affairs,—that

the providence of GOD ſtood neuter and unconcerned in their ſeveral workings, leaving them to the mercy of time and chance, to be furthered or diſappointed as ſuch blind agents directed. Whereas in truth the very oppoſite concluſion follows. For conſider,—if a ſuperior intelligent power did not ſometimes croſs and over-rule events in this world—then our policies and deſigns in it would always anſwer according to the wiſdom and ſtratagem in which they were laid, and every cauſe, in the courſe of things, would produce its natural effect without variation. Now, as this is not the caſe, it neceſſarily follows, from Solomon's reaſoning, that, if the race is not to the ſwift, if knowledge and learning do not always ſecure men from want,—nor care and induſtry always make men rich—nor art and ſkill infallibly make men high in the world; that there is ſome other cauſe which mingles itſelf in human affairs, and governs and turns them as it pleaſes; which cauſe can be no other than the Firſt Cauſe of all things, and the ſecret and over-ruling providence of that Almighty GOD, who, though his dwelling is ſo high, yet he humbleth himſelf to behold the things that are done on earth, raiſing up the poor out of the duſt, and lifting the beggar from the dunghill, and, contrary to all hopes, putting him with princes, even with the princes of his people; which, by the way, was the caſe of David, who makes the acknowledgment!—And no doubt—one reaſon, why GOD has ſelected to his own diſpoſal ſo many inſtances as this, where events have run counter to all probabilities—was to give teſtimony to his providence in governing the world, and to engage us to a conſideration and dependence upon it for the event and ſucceſs

ceſs of our undertakings *. For undoubtedly—as I ſaid,—it ſhould ſeem but ſuitable to nature's law, that the race ſhould ever be to the ſwift,—and the battle to the ſtrong; it is reaſonable that the beſt contrivances and means ſhould have beſt ſucceſs:—and ſince it often falls out otherwiſe in the caſe of man, where the wiſeſt projects are overthrown,—and the moſt hopeful means are blaſted, and time and chance happens to all,—you muſt call in the Deity to untye this knot:——for though at ſundry times—ſundry events fall out,—which we, who look no further than the events themſelves, call chance, becauſe they fall out quite contrary both to our intentions and hopes,—yet, at the ſame time, in reſpect of GOD's providence over-ruling in theſe events, it were profane to call them chance, for they are pure deſignation, and though inviſible, are ſtill the regular diſpenſations of the ſuperintending power of that Almighty Being, from whom all the laws and powers of nature are derived;—who, as he has appointed,—ſo holds them as inſtruments in his hands; and, without invading the liberty and free-will of his creatures, can turn the paſſions and deſires of their hearts to fulfil his own righteouſneſs, and work ſuch effects in human affairs, which to us ſeem merely *caſual*,—but to him, certain and determined, and what his infinite wiſdom ſees neceſſary to be brought about, for the government and preſervation of the world, over which providence perpetually preſides.

When the ſons of Jacob had caſt their brother Joſeph into the pit for his deſtruction,——one would think, if ever any incident which con-

* *Vide Tillotſon's ſermon on this ſubject.*

cerned the life of man deſerved to be called chance, it was this,—that the company of Iſhmaelites ſhould happen to paſs by in that open country, at that very place, at that time too, when this barbarity was committed. After he was reſcued by ſo favourable a contingency,—his life and future fortune ſtill depended upon a ſeries of contingencies equally improbable; for inſtance, had the buſineſs of the Iſhmaelites who bought him, carried them from Gilead, to any other part of the world beſides Egypt; or, when they arrived there, had they ſold their bond-ſlave to any other man but Potiphar, throughout the whole empire,——or, after that diſpoſal, had the unjuſt accuſations of his maſter's wife caſt the youth into any other dungeon, than that where the king's priſoners were kept,—or had it fallen out at any other criſis, than when Pharaoh's chief butler was caſt there too,—had this or any other of theſe events fallen out otherwiſe than it did,———a ſeries of unmerited misfortunes had overwhelmed him,—and, in conſequence, the whole land of Egypt and Canaan. From the firſt opening to the concluſion of this long and intereſting tranſaction, the providence of GOD ſuffered every thing to take its courſe: the malice and cruelty of Joſeph's brethren, wrought their worſt miſchief againſt him;—baniſhed him from his country and the protection of his parent.—The luſt and baſeneſs of a diſappointed woman ſunk him ſtill deeper:———loaded his character with an unjuſt reproach,——and, to complete his ruin, doomed him, friendleſs, to the miſeries of a hopeleſs priſon, where he lay neglected. Providence, though it did not croſs theſe events,—yet providence bent them to the moſt merciful ends.

When

When the whole DRAMA was opened, then the wiſdom and contrivance of every part of it was diſplayed. Then it appeared, it was not they (as the patriarch inferred in conſolation of his brethren), it was not they who ſold him, but GOD,——'twas he ſent him thither before them,—his ſuperintending power availed itſelf of their paſſions—directed the operation of them,—held the chain in his hand, and turned and wound it to his own purpoſe. "Ye verily thought evil againſt me,—but GOD meant it for good,—ye had the guilt of a bad intention,—his providence the glory of accompliſhing a good one,—by preſerving *you a poſterity upon the earth, and bringing to paſs as it is this day, to ſave much people alive.*" All hiſtory is full of ſuch teſtimonies, which though they may convince thoſe who look no deeper than the ſurface of things, that time and chance happen to all,—yet to thoſe who look deeper, they manifeſt at the ſame time that there is a hand much buſier in human affairs than what we vainly calculate; which, though the projectors of this world overlook,—or at leaſt make no allowance for in the formation of their plans, they generally find it in the execution of them. And though the faſhion may urge, that every event in this life is brought about by the miniſtry and chain of natural cauſes,---yet, in anſwer,---let him go one ſtep higher,---and conſider,---whoſe power it is that enables theſe cauſes to work,---whoſe knowledge it is that foreſees what will be their effects,---whoſe goodneſs it is that is inviſibly conducting them forwards to the beſt and greateſt end for the happineſs of his creatures.

So that, as a great reaſoner juſtly diſtinguiſhes, upon this point,---"It is not only religiouſly ſpeaking, but with the ſtricteſt and moſt philoſophical truth of expreſſion, that the ſcripture tells, *that* GOD *commandeth* the ravens: ---that they are his directions, which the *winds and the ſeas obey*. If his ſervant hides himſelf by the brook, ſuch an order of cauſes and effects ſhall be laid,---that the fowls of the air ſhall miniſter to his ſupport.——When this reſource fails and his prophet is directed to go to Zerapha,——for that he has *commanded* a widow woman there to ſuſtain him,---the ſame hand which leads the prophet to the gate of the city---ſhall lead forth the diſtreſſed widow to the ſame place, to take him under her roof,---and, tho' upon the impulſe of a different occaſion, ſhall nevertheleſs be made to fulfil his promiſe and intention of their mutual preſervation."

Thus much for the truth and illuſtration of this great and fundamental doctrine of a providence; the belief of which is of ſuch conſequence to us, as to be the great ſupport and comfort of our lives.

Juſtly therefore might the pſalmiſt upon this declaration,——that the LORD is King,—conclude that the earth may be glad therefore, yea the multitude of the iſles may be glad thereof.

May GOD grant the perſuaſion may make us as virtuous, as it has reaſon to make us joyful; and that it may bring forth in us the fruits of good living to his praiſe and glory to whom be all might, majeſty and dominion, now and for evermore, *Amen*.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

The Character of HEROD.

Preached on Innocents Day.

MATTHEW ii. 17, 18.

Then was fulfilled that which was ſpoken by Jeremy the prophet, ſaying,—In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachael weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, becauſe they are not.

THE words which St. Matthew cites here as fulfilled by the cruelty and ambition of Herod,—are in the 31ſt chapter of Jeremiah 15th verſe. In the foregoing chapter, the prophet having declared God's intention of turning the mourning of his people into joy, by the reſtoration of the tribes which had been led away captive into Babylon; he proceeds, in the beginning of this chapter, which contains this prophecy, to give a more particular deſcription of the great joy, and feſtivity of that promiſed day, when they were to return once more to their own land, to enter upon their ancient poſſeſſions, and enjoy again all the privileges they had loſt, and,—amongſt others, and what was above them all,—the favour and protection of GOD, and the continuation of his mercies to them and their poſterity.

To

To make, therefore, the impreſſion of this change the ſtronger upon their minds——he gives a very pathetic repreſentation of the preceding ſorrow on that day when they were firſt led away captive.

Thus ſaith the Lord, A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachael weeping for her children, refuſed to be comforted, becauſe they were not.

To enter into the full ſenſe and beauty of this deſcription, it is to be remembered that the tomb of Rachael, Jacob's beloved wife, as we read in the 35th of Geneſis, was ſituated near Rama, and betwixt that place and Bethlehem. Upon which circumſtance the prophet raiſes one of the moſt affecting ſcenes that could be conceived; for as the tribes in their ſorrowful journey betwixt Rama and Bethlehem in their way to Babylon, were ſuppoſed to paſs by this monumental pillar of their anceſtor Rachael, Jacob's wife, the prophet, by a common liberty in rhetoric, introduces her as riſing up out of her ſepulchre, and as the common mother of two of their tribes, weeping for her children, bewailing the ſad cataſtrophe of her poſterity led away into a ſtrange land,——refuſing to be comforted, becauſe they were not,——loſt and cut off from their country, and, in all likelihood, never to be reſtored back to her again.

The Jewiſh interpreters ſay upon this, that the patriarch Jacob buried Rachael in this very place, foreſeeing by the ſpirit of prophecy, that his poſterity ſhould that way be led captive, that ſhe might, as they paſſed by her, intercede for them.—

But this fanciful ſuperſtructure upon the paſſage, ſeems to be little elſe than a mere dream

of

of ſome of the Jewiſh doctors; and indeed had they not dream'd it when they did, 'tis great odds, but ſome of the Romiſh dreamers would have hit upon it before now. For as it favours the doctrine of interceſſions—if there had not been undeniable vouchers for the real inventors of the conceit, one ſhould much ſooner have ſought for it amongſt the oral traditions of this church, than in the Talmud, where it is.—

But this by the bye. There is ſtill another interpretation of the words here cited by St. Matthew, which altogether excludes this ſcenical repreſentation I have given of them.——By which 'tis thought that the lamentation of Rachael, here deſcribed, has no immediate reference to Rachael, Jacob's wife; but that it ſimply alludes to the ſorrows of her deſcendants, the diſtreſſed mothers of the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim who might accompany their children, led into captivity, as far as Rama, in their way to Babylon, who wept and wailed upon this ſad occaſion, and as the prophet deſcribes them in the perſon of Rachael, refuſing to be comforted for the loſs of her children, looking upon their departure without hope or proſpect of ever beholding a return.

Whichever of the two ſenſes you give the words of the prophet, the application of them by the evangeliſt is equally juſt and faithful. For as the former ſcene he relates was tranſacted upon the very ſame ſtage,——in the ſame diſtrict of Bethlehem near Rama——where ſo many mothers of the ſame tribe now ſuffered this ſecond moſt affecting blow—the words of Jeremiah, as the evangeliſt obſerves, were literally accompliſhed, and no doubt, in that horrid day, a voice was heard again in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping—Rachael weeping for her children, and refuſing

refuſing to be comforted;—every Bethlemitiſh mother involved in this calamity, beholding it with hopeleſs ſorrow—gave vent to it—each one bewailing her children, and lamenting the hardneſs of their lot, with the anguiſh of a heart as uncapable of conſolation, as they were of redreſs. Monſter!—could no conſideration of all this tender ſorrow ſtay thy hands?—Could no reflection upon ſo much bitter lamentation throughout the coaſts of Bethlehem, interpoſe and plead in behalf of ſo many wretched objects, as this tragedy would make?—Was there no way open to ambition, but that thou muſt trample upon the affections of nature? Could no pity for the innocence of childhood—no ſympathy for the yearnings of parental love, incline thee to ſome other meaſures for thy ſecurity—but thou muſt thus pitileſsly ruſh in—take the victim by violence—tear it from the embraces of the mother—offer it up before her eyes—leave her diſconſolate for ever—broken-hearted with a loſs—ſo affecting in itſelf—ſo circumſtanced with horror, that no time, how friendly ſoever to the mournful—ſhould ever be able to wear out the impreſſion?

There is nothing in which the mind of man is more divided than in the accounts of this horrid nature.—For when we conſider man, as faſhioned by his Maker—innocent and upright—full of the tendereſt diſpoſitions—with a heart inclining him to kindneſs, and the love and protection of his ſpecies—this idea of him would almoſt ſhake the credit of ſuch accounts;—ſo that to clear them—we are forced to take a ſecond view of man—very different from this favourable one in which we inſenſibly repreſent him to our imaginations—that is—we are obliged to conſider him

him—not as he was made—but as he is—a creature by the violence and irregularity of his paſſions capable of being perverted from all theſe friendly and benevolent propenſities, and ſometimes hurried into exceſſes ſo oppoſite to them, as to render the moſt unnatural and horrid accounts of what he does but too probable.—The truth of this obſervation will be exemplified in the caſe before us. For next to the faith and character of the hiſtorian who reports ſuch facts,—the particular character of the perſon who committed them is to be conſidered as a voucher for their truth and credibility; and if, upon inquiry, it appears that the man acted but conſiſtent with himſelf,—and juſt ſo as you would have expected from his principles,—the credit of the hiſtorian is reſtored,—and the fact related ſtands inconteſtable, from ſo ſtrong and concurring an evidence on its ſide.—

With this view, it may not be an unacceptable application of the remaining part of a diſcourſe upon this day, to give you a ſketch of the character of Herod, not as drawn from ſcripture,—for, in general, it furniſhes us with few materials for ſuch deſcriptions:—the ſacred ſcripture cuts off in few words the hiſtory of the ungodly, how great ſoever they were in the eyes of the world,—and, on the other hand dwells largely upon the ſmalleſt actions of the righteous.—We find all the circumſtances of the lives of Abraham, Iſaac, Jacob, and Joſeph, recorded in the minuteſt manner.—The wicked ſeem only mentioned with regret; juſt brought upon the ſtage, on purpoſe to be condemned. The uſe and advantage of which conduct—is, I ſuppoſe, the reaſon—as in general it enlarges on no character, but what is worthy of imitation. 'Tis however

ever undeniable, that the lives of bad men are not without uſe;—and whenever ſuch a one is drawn, not with a corrupt view to be admired,—but on purpoſe to be deteſted,—it muſt excite ſuch an horror againſt vice, as will ſtrike indirectly the ſame good impreſſion. And though it is painful in the laſt degree to paint a man in the ſhades which his vices have caſt upon him,—yet when it ſerves this end, and at the ſame time illuſtrates a point in ſacred hiſtory—it carries its own excuſe with it.

This Herod, therefore, of whom the evangeliſt ſpeaks, if you take a ſuperficial view of his life, you would ſay was a compound of good and evil; that though he was certainly a bad man,—yet you would think the maſs was tempered at the ſame time with a mixture of good qualities. So that, in courſe, as is not uncommon, he would appear with two characters very different from each other. If you looked upon the more favourable ſide, you would ſee a man of great addreſs—popular in his behaviour,—generous, prince-like in his entertainments and expences, and, in a word, ſet off with all ſuch virtue and ſhewy properties, as bid high for the countenance and approbation of the world.

View him in another light, he was an ambitious, deſigning man,——ſuſpicious of all the world,—rapacious,—implacable in his temper, without ſenſe of religion,—or feeling of humanity.—Now in all ſuch complex characters as this,—the way the world uſually judges, is——to ſum up the good and the bad againſt each other—deduct the leſſer of theſe articles from the greater, and (as we do in paſſing other accounts) give credit to the man for what remains upon the balance. Now, tho' this ſeems a fair,——yet I fear

fear 'tis often a fallacious reckoning,—which, tho' it may ſerve in many ordinary caſes of private life, yet will not hold good in the more notorious inſtances of mens lives, eſpecially when ſo complicated with good and bad, as to exceed all common bounds and proportions. Not to be deceived in ſuch caſes, we muſt work by a different rule, which, tho' it may appear leſs candid, ——yet, to make amends, I am perſuaded will bring us in general much nearer to the thing we want,—which is truth. The way to which is—in all judgments of this kind, to diſtinguiſh and carry in your eye the principal and ruling paſſion which leads the character—and ſeparate that from the other parts of it,—and then take notice, how far his other qualities, good and bad, are brought to ſerve and ſupport that. For want of this diſtinction,—we often think ourſelves inconſiſtent creatures, when we are the furtheſt from it, and all the variety of ſhapes and contradictory appearances we put on, are, in truth, but ſo many different attempts to gratify the ſame governing appetite.—

With this clew, let us endeavour to unravel this character of Herod, as here given.

The firſt thing which ſtrikes one in it, is ambition, an immoderate thirſt, as well as jealouſy of power;—how inconſiſtent ſoever in other parts, his character appears invariable in this, and every action of his life was true to it.—— From hence we may venture to conclude, that this was *his* ruling paſſion,—and that moſt, if not all the other wheels were put in motion by this firſt ſpring. Now let us conſider how far this was the caſe in fact.

To begin with the worſt part of him,——I ſaid he was a man of no ſenſe of religion, or

at

at leaſt no other ſenſe of it, but that which ſerved his turn—for he is recorded to have built temples in Judea, and erected images in them for idolatrous worſhip,—not from a perſuaſion of doing right, for he was bred a Jew, and conſequently taught to abhor all idolatry,—but he was in truth ſacrificing all his time to a greater idol of his own, his ruling paſſion; for if we may truſt Joſephus, his ſole view in ſo groſs a compliance was to ingratiate himſelf with Auguſtus and the great men of Rome from whom he held his power.—With this he was greedy and rapacious——how could he be otherwiſe, with ſo devouring an appetite as ambition to provide for?—He was jealous in his nature, and ſuſpicious of all the world.—Shew me an ambitious man that is not ſo; for as ſuch a man's hand, like Iſhmael's, is againſt every man, he concludes that every man's hand in courſe is againſt him.

Few men were ever guilty of more aſtoniſhing acts of cruelty—and yet the particular inſtances of them in Herod were ſuch as he was hurried into, by the alarms this waking paſſion perpetually gave him. He put the whole Sanhedrim to the ſword—ſparing neither age, or wiſdom, or merit—one cannot ſuppoſe, ſimply from an inclination to cruelty—no—they had oppoſed the eſtabliſhment of his power at Jeruſalem.

His own ſons, two hopeful youths, he cut off by a public execution.—The worſt men have natural affection—and ſuch a ſtroke as this would run ſo contrary to the natural workings of it, that you are forced to ſuppoſe the impulſe of ſome more violent inclination to over-rule and conquer it. And ſo it was; for the Jewiſh hiſtorian tells us,

us, 'twas jealouſy of power,—his darling object—of which he feared they would one day or other diſpoſſeſs him—ſufficient inducement to tranſport a man of ſuch a temper into the bloodieſt exceſſes.

Thus far this one fatal and extravagant paſſion, accounts for the dark ſide of Herod's character. This governing principle being firſt laid open—all his other bad actions follow in courſe, like ſo many ſymptomatic complaints from the ſame diſtemper.

Let us ſee, if this was not the caſe even of his virtues too.

At firſt ſight it ſeems a myſtery——how a man, ſo black as Herod has been thus far deſcribed—ſhould be able to ſupport himſelf in the favour and friendſhip of ſo wiſe and penetrating a body of men, as the Roman ſenate, of whom he held his power. To counter-balance the weight of ſo bad and deteſted a character——and be able to bear it up, as Herod did, one would think he muſt have been maſter of ſome great ſecret worth enquiring after—he was ſo. But that ſecret was no other than what appears on this reverſe of his character. He was a perſon of great addreſs—popular in his outward behaviour—he was generous, prince-like in his entertainments and expences. The world was then as corrupt, at leaſt, as now—and Herod underſtood it—knew at what price it was to be bought——and what qualities would bid the higheſt for its good word and approbation.

And in truth, he judged this matter ſo well,—that notwithſtanding the general odium and prepoſſeſſion which aroſe againſt ſo hateful a character—in ſpight of all the ill impreſſions from ſo many repeated complaints of his cruelties and oppreſſions

oppreſſions—he yet ſtemmed the torrent—and by the ſpecious diſplay of theſe popular virtues bore himſelf up againſt it all his life. So that at length, when he was ſummoned to Rome to anſwer for his crimes—Joſephus tells us—that by the mere magnificence of his expences—and the apparent generoſity of his behaviour, he entirely confuted the whole charge—and ſo ingratiated himſelf with the Roman ſenate—and won the heart of Auguſtus—(as he had that of Anthony before) that he ever after had his favour and kindneſs; which I cannot mention without adding——that it is an eternal ſtain upon the character and memory of Auguſtus, that he ſold his countenance and protection to ſo bad a man, for ſo mean and baſe a conſideration.

From this point of view, if we look back upon Herod—his beſt qualities will ſhrink into little room, and how glittering ſoever in appearance, when brought to this balance are found wanting. And in truth if we would not willingly be deceived in the value of any virtue, or ſet of virtues in ſo complex a character——we muſt call them to this very account; examine whom they ſerve, what paſſion and what principle they have for their maſter. When this is underſtood the whole clew is unravelled at once, and the character of Herod, as complicated as it is given us in hiſtory——when thus analyſed, is ſummed up in three words——*That he was a man of unbounded ambition, who ſtuck at nothing to gratify it*;—ſo that not only his vices were miniſterial to his ruling paſſion, but his virtues too (if they deſerve the name) were drawn in, and liſted into the ſame ſervice.

Thus much for the character of Herod—the critical review of which has many obvious uſes,

to which I may truſt you, having time but to mention that particular one which firſt led me into this examination, namely, that all objections againſt the evangeliſt's account of this day's ſlaughter of the Bethlemitiſh infants—from the incredibility of ſo horrid an account—are ſilenced by this account of the man; ſince in this he acted but like himſelf, and juſt ſo as you would expect in the ſame circumſtances, from every man of ſo ambitious a head—and ſo bad a heart.—Conſider, what havock ambition has made—how often the ſame tragedy has been acted upon larger theatres—where not only the innocence of childhood——or the grey hairs of the aged, have found no protection—but whole countries without diſtinction have been put to the ſword; or, what is as cruel, have been driven forth to nakedneſs and famine, to make way for new ones, under the guidance of this paſſion.—For a ſpecimen of this, reflect upon the ſtory related by Plutarch:—when by order of the Roman ſenate, ſeventy populous cities were unawares ſacked and deſtroyed at one prefixed hour, by P. Æmilius—by whom one hundred and fifty thouſand unhappy people were driven in one day into captivity—to be ſold to the higheſt bidder, to end their days in cruel labour and anguiſh. As aſtoniſhing as the account before us is, it vaniſhes into nothing from ſuch views, ſince it is plain from all hiſtory, that there is no wickedneſs too great for ſo unbounded a cauſe, and that the moſt horrid accounts in hiſtory are, as I ſaid above, but too probable effects of it.—

May GOD of his mercy defend mankind from future experiments of this kind—and grant we may make a proper uſe of them, for the ſake of JESUS CHRIST, *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON X.

JOB's Account of the Shortneſs and Troubles of Life, conſidered.

JOB xix. 1, 2.

Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble:—He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth alſo as a ſhadow, and continueth not.

THERE is ſomething in this reflection of holy Job's, upon the ſhortneſs of life, and inſtability of human affairs ſo beautiful and truly ſublime; that one might challenge the writings of the moſt celebrated orators of antiquity, to produce a ſpecimen of eloquence, ſo noble and thoroughly affecting. Whether this effect be owing, in ſome meaſure, to the pathetic nature of the ſubject reflected on;—or to the eaſtern manner of expreſſion, in a ſtile more exalted and ſuitable to ſo great a ſubject, or (which is the more likely account) becauſe they are properly the words of that Being, who firſt inſpired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter, who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the tongue of the infant eloquent;—to which of theſe we are to refer the beauty and ſublimity of this, as well as that of numberleſs other paſſages in holy writ, may not ſeem now material; but ſurely, without theſe helps, never man was better qualified to make juſt and noble reflections upon the ſhortneſs of human life, and inſtability of human affairs,

affairs, than Job was, who had himſelf waded through ſuch a ſea of troubles, and in his paſſage had encountered many viciſſitudes of ſtorms and ſunſhine, and by turns had felt both the extremes, of all the happineſs, and all the wretchedneſs, that mortal man is heir to.

The beginning of his days was crowned with every thing that ambition could wiſh for;—he was the greateſt of all the men of the Eaſt—had large and unbounded poſſeſſions, and no doubt enjoyed all the comforts and advantages of life, which they could adminiſter.—Perhaps you will ſay, a wiſe man might not be inclined to give a full looſe to this kind of happineſs, without ſome better ſecurity for the ſupport of it, than the mere poſſeſſion of ſuch goods of fortune, which often ſlip from under us, and ſometimes unaccountably make themſelves wings, and fly away.—But he had that ſecurity too;—for the hand of providence, which had thus far protected, was ſtill leading him forwards, and ſeemed engaged in the preſervation and continuance of theſe bleſſings;—GOD had ſet a hedge about him, and about all that he had on every ſide; he had bleſſed all the works of his hands, and his ſubſtance increaſed every day. Indeed, even with this ſecurity, riches to him who hath *neither child nor brother*, as the wiſe man obſerves, inſtead of a comfort, prove ſometimes a ſore travel and vexation.—— The mind of man is not always ſatisfied with the reaſonable aſſurance of its own enjoyments, but will look forwards, and if it diſcovers ſome imaginary void, the want of ſome beloved object to fill his place after him, will often diſquiet itſelf in vain, and ſay—— "For whom do I labour, and bereave myſelf of reſt."

This

This bar to his happineſs GOD had likewiſe taken away, in bleſſing him with a numerous offſpring of ſons and daughters, the apparent inheritors of all his preſent happineſs—Pleaſing reflection! to think the bleſſings GOD has indulged one's ſelf in, ſhall be handed and continued down to a man's own ſeed: how little does this differ from a ſecond enjoyment of them, to an affectionate parent? who naturally looks forward with as ſtrong an intereſt upon his children, as if he was to live over again in his own poſterity.

What could be wanting to finiſh ſuch a picture of a happy man?—Surely nothing, except a virtuous diſpoſition to give a reliſh to theſe bleſſings, and direct him to make a proper uſe of them.—He had that too, for he was a perfect and upright man, one that feared GOD, and eſchewed evil.

In the midſt of all this proſperity, which was as great as could well fall to the ſhare of one man;—whilſt all the world looked gay, and ſmiled upon him, and every thing round him ſeemed to promiſe, if poſſible, an increaſe of happineſs, in one inſtant all is changed into ſorrow and utter deſpair.——

It pleaſes GOD for wiſe purpoſes, to blaſt the fortunes of his houſe, and cut off the hopes of his poſterity, and in one mournful day to bring this great prince from his palace down to the dunghill. His flocks and herds, in which conſiſted the abundance of his wealth, were part conſumed by a fire from heaven, the remainder taken away by the ſword of the enemy: his ſons and daughters, whom 'tis natural to imagine ſo good a man had ſo brought up in a ſenſe of their duty, as to give him all reaſonable hopes of much joy and pleaſure in their future lives:—natural proſpect for a parent to look forwards at, to recompenſe

compenſe him for the many cares and anxieties which their infancy had coſt him! theſe dear pledges of his future happineſs were all, all ſnatched from him at one blow, juſt at the time that one might imagine they were beginning to be the comfort and delight of his old age, which moſt wanted ſuch ſtaves to lean on:—and as circumſtances add to an evil, ſo they did to this;—for it fell out not only by a very calamitous accident, which was grievous enough in itſelf, but likewiſe upon the back of his other misfortunes, when he was ill prepared to bear ſuch a ſhock; and what would ſtill add to it, it happened at an hour when he had leaſt reaſon to expect it, when he would naturally think his children ſecure and out of the way of danger. "For whilſt they were "feaſting and making merry in their eldeſt bro-"ther's houſe, a great wind out of the wilderneſs "ſmote the four corners of the houſe, and it "fell upon them."

Such a concurrence of misfortunes are not the common lot of many: and yet there are inſtances of ſome who have undergone as ſevere trials, and bravely ſtruggled under them; perhaps by natural force of ſpirits, the advantages of health, and the cordial aſſiſtance of a friend. And with theſe helps, what may not a man ſuſtain?—But this was not Job's caſe; for ſcarce had theſe evils fallen upon him, when he was not only borne down with a grievous diſtemper, which afflicted him from the crown of his head to the ſole of his foot, but likewiſe his three friends, in whoſe kind conſolations he might have found a medicine,—even the wife of his boſom, whoſe duty it was, with a gentle hand, to have ſoftened all his ſorrows, inſtead of doing this, they cruelly inſulted and became the reproachers of his integrity. O

GOD! what is man, when thou thus bruiſeſt him, and makeſt his burden heavier as his ſtrength grows leſs? Who, that had found himſelf thus an example of the many chances and changes of this mortal life;—when he conſidered himſelf now ſtripped and left deſtitute of ſo many valuable bleſſings which the moment before thy providence had poured upon his head;—when he reflected upon this gay delightſome ſtructure, in appearance ſo ſtrongly built, ſo pleaſingly ſurrounded with every thing that could flatter his hopes and wiſhes, and beheld it all levelled with the ground in one moment, and the whole proſpect vaniſh with it like the deſcription of an enchantment;—who, I ſay, that had ſeen and felt the ſhock of ſo ſudden a revolution, would not have been furniſhed with juſt and beautiful reflections upon the occaſion? and ſaid with Job in the words of the text, "That man that is born of a woman, is "of few days, and full of miſery;—that he com-"eth forth like a flower, and is cut down; he "fleeth alſo as a ſhadow, and continueth not."

The words of the text are an epitome of the *natural* and *moral* vanity of man, and contain two diſtinct declarations concerning his ſtate and condition in each reſpect.

Firſt, that he is a creature of few days; and, ſecondly, that thoſe days are full of trouble.

I ſhall make ſome reflections upon each of theſe in their order, and conclude with a practical leſſon from the whole.

And, firſt, that he is of few days. The compariſon which Job makes uſe of, That man cometh forth like a flower, is extremely beautiful, and more to the purpoſe than the moſt elaborate proof, which, in truth, the ſubject will not eaſily admit of;—the ſhortneſs of life being a point ſo generally

generally complained of in all ages ſince the flood, and ſo univerſally felt and acknowledged by the whole ſpecies, as to require no evidence beyond a ſimilitude; the intent of which is not ſo much to prove the fact, as to illuſtrate and place it in ſuch a light as to ſtrike us, and bring the impreſſion home to ourſelves in a more affecting manner.

Man comes forth, ſays Job, like a flower, and is cut down;—he is ſent into the world the faireſt and nobleſt part of GOD's works,—faſhioned after the image of his Creator, with reſpect to reaſon and the great faculties of the mind; he cometh forth glorious as the flower of the field; as it ſurpaſſes the vegetable world in beauty, ſo does he the animal world in the glory and excellency of his nature.

The one—if no untimely accident oppreſs it, ſoon arrives at the full period of its perfection,—is ſuffered to triumph for a few moments, and is plucked up by the roots in the very pride and gayeſt ſtage of its being;—or if it happens to eſcape the hands of violence, in a few days it neceſſarily ſickens of itſelf, and dies away.

Man likewiſe, though his progreſs is ſlower, and his duration ſomething longer, yet the periods of his growth and declenſion are nearly the ſame, both in the nature and manner of them.

If he eſcapes the dangers which threaten his tenderer years, he is ſoon got into the full maturity and ſtrength of life; and if he is ſo fortunate as not to be hurried out of it then by accidents, by his own folly and intemperance—if he eſcapes theſe, he naturally decays of himſelf;—a period comes faſt upon him, beyond which he was not made to laſt.—Like a flower or fruit which may be plucked up by force before the time of their maturity, yet cannot be made to outgrow the period

when they are to fade and drop of themſelves; when that comes, the hand of nature then plucks them both off, and no art of the botaniſt can uphold the one, or ſkill of the phyſician preſerve the other, beyond the periods to which their original frames and conſtitutions were made to extend. As GOD has appointed and determined the ſeveral growths and decays of the vegetable race, ſo he ſeems as evidently to have preſcribed the ſame laws to man, as well as all living creatures, in the firſt rudiments of which, there are contained the ſpecific powers of their growth, duration, and extinction; and when the evolutions of thoſe animal powers are exhauſted and run down, the creature expires and dies of itſelf, as ripe fruit falls from the tree, or a flower preſerved beyond its bloom, drops and periſhes upon the ſtalk.

Thus much for this compariſon of Job's, which, though it is very poetical, yet conveys a juſt idea of the thing referred to.——"That he "fleeth alſo as a ſhadow, and continueth not,"—is no leſs a faithful and fine repreſentation of the ſhortneſs and vanity of human life, of which one cannot give a better explanation than by referring to the original, from whence the picture was taken.——With how quick a ſucceſſion do days, months and years paſs over our heads?—how truly like a ſhadow that departeth do they flee away inſenſibly, and ſcarce leave an impreſſion with us?——when we endeavour to call them back by reflection, and conſider in what manner they have gone, how unable are the beſt of us to give a tolerable account?—and were it not for ſome of the more remarkable ſtages which have diſtinguiſhed a few periods of this rapid progreſs——we ſhould look back upon it all as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his dream when he awoke in the morning;—he was ſenſible many things had paſſed,

paſſed, and troubled him too; but had paſſed on ſo quickly, they had left no footſteps behind, by which he could be enabled to trace them back.——Melancholy account of the life of man! which generally runs on in ſuch a manner, as ſcarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone.

How many of our firſt years ſlide by in the innocent ſports of childhood, in which we are not able to make reflections upon them?—how many more thoughtleſs years eſcape us in our youth, when we are unwilling to do it, and are ſo eager in the purſuit of pleaſure as to have no time to ſpare, to ſtop and conſider them?

When graver and riper years come on, and we begin to think it time to reform and ſet up for men of ſenſe and conduct, then the buſineſs and perplexing intereſts of this world, and the endleſs plotting and contriving how to make the moſt of it, do ſo wholly employ us, that we are too buſy to make reflections upon ſo unprofitable a ſubject. —As families and children increaſe, ſo do our affections, and with them are multiplied our cares and toils for their preſervation and eſtabliſhment; ——all which take up our thoughts ſo cloſely, and poſſeſs them ſo long, that we are often overtaken by grey hairs before we ſee them, or have found leiſure to conſider how far we were got,—what we have been doing,—and for what purpoſe GOD ſent us into the world. As man may juſtly be ſaid to be of few days, conſidered with reſpect to this haſty ſucceſſion of things, which ſoon carries him into the decline of his life, ſo may he likewiſe be ſaid to flee like a ſhadow and continue not, when his duration is compared with other parts of GOD's works, and even the works of his own hands, which outlaſt him many generations;

——whilſt, as Homer obſerves, like leaves, one generation drops, and another ſprings up to fall again and be forgotten.

But when we further conſider his days in the light in which we ought chiefly to view them, as they appear in thy ſight, O GOD! with whom a thouſand years are but as yeſterday; when we reflect that this hand-breadth of life is all that is meaſured out to us from that eternity for which he is created, how does his ſhort ſpan vaniſh to nothing in the compariſon! 'Tis true, the greateſt portion of time will do the ſame when compared with what is to come; and therefore ſo ſhort and tranſitory a one, as threeſcore years and ten, beyond which all is declared to be labour and ſorrow, may the eaſier be allowed: and yet how uncertain are we of that portion, ſhort as it is? Do not ten thouſand accidents break off the ſlender thread of human life, long before it can be drawn out to that extent?—The new-born babe falls down an eaſy prey, and moulders back again into duſt, like a tender bloſſom put forth in an untimely hour.——The hopeful youth in the very pride and beauty of life is cut off, ſome cruel diſtemper or unthought of accident lays him proſtrate upon the earth, to purſue Job's compariſon, like a blooming flower ſmit and ſhrivelled up with a malignant blaſt.—In this ſtage of life chances multiply upon us,—the ſeeds of diſorders are ſown by intemperance or neglect,—infectious diſtempers are more eaſily contracted, when contracted they rage with greater violence, and the ſucceſs in many caſes is more doubtful, inſomuch that they who have exerciſed themſelves in computations of this kind tell us, "That "one half of the whole ſpecies which are born "into the world, go out of it again, and are all "dead

" dead in ſo ſhort a ſpace as the firſt ſeventeen " years."

Theſe reflections may be ſufficient to illuſtrate the firſt part of Job's declaration, " *That man is* " *of few days.*" Let us examine the truth of the other, and ſee, whether he is not likewiſe full of trouble.

And here we muſt not take our account from the flattering outſide of things, which are generally ſet off with a glittering appearance enough, eſpecially in what is called *higher life.*—Nor can we ſafely truſt the evidence of ſome of the more merry and thoughtleſs amongſt us, who are ſo ſet upon the enjoyment of life, as ſeldom to reflect upon the troubles of it;—or who, perhaps, becauſe they are not yet come to this portion of their inheritance, imagine it is not their common lot.—Nor laſtly, are we to form an idea of it, from the deluſive ſtories of a few of the moſt proſperous paſſengers, who have fortunately ſailed through and eſcaped the rougher toils and diſtreſſes. But we are to take our account from a cloſe ſurvey of human life, and the real face of things, ſtript of every thing that can palliate or gild it over. We muſt hear the general complaint of all ages, and read the hiſtories of mankind. If we look into them, and examine them to the bottom, what do they contain but the hiſtory of ſad and uncomfortable paſſages, which a good-natured man cannot read but with oppreſſion of ſpirits. —— Conſider the dreadful ſucceſſion of wars in one part or other of the earth perpetuated from one century to another with ſo little intermiſſion, that mankind have ſcarce had time to breathe from them, ſince ambition firſt came into the world; conſider the horrid effects of them in all thoſe barbarous devaſtations we read of, where whole nations have been put to the ſword,

or have been driven out to nakedneſs and famine to make room for new-comers.—Conſider how great a part of our ſpecies in all ages down to this, have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their diſtreſſes.—Conſider ſlavery,—what it is,—how bitter a draught, and how many millions have been made to drink of it;—which, if it can poiſon all earthly happineſs when exerciſed barely upon our bodies, what muſt it be, when it comprehends both the ſlavery of body and mind?—To conceive this, look into the hiſtory of the Romiſh church and her tyrants, (or rather executioners), who ſeem to have taken pleaſure in the pangs and convulſions of their fellow-creatures. — Examine the inquiſition, hear the melancholy notes ſounded in every cell.—Conſider the anguiſh of mock trials, and the exquiſite tortures conſequent thereupon, mercileſsly inflicted upon the unfortunate, where the racked and weary ſoul has ſo often wiſhed to take its leave, — but cruelly not ſuffered to depart. — Conſider how many of theſe helpleſs wretches have been haled from thence in all periods of this tyrannic uſurpation, to undergo the maſſacres and flames to which a falſe and a bloody religion has condemned them.

If this ſad hiſtory and detail of the more public cauſes of the miſeries of man are not ſufficient, let us behold him in another light, with reſpect to the more private cauſes of them, and ſee whether he is not full of trouble likewiſe there, and almoſt born to it as naturally as the ſparks fly upwards. If we conſider man as a creature full of wants and neceſſities (whether real or imaginary) which he is not able to ſupply of himſelf, what a train of diſappointments, vexations and dependencies

dependencies are to be ſeen, iſſuing from thence to perplex and make his being uneaſy?---How many juſtlings and hard ſtruggles do we undergo in making our way in the world?——How barbarouſly held back?—How often and baſely overthrown, in aiming only at getting bread?—How many of us never attain it,——at leaſt not comfortably,——but from various and unknown cauſes—eat it all their lives long in bitterneſs?

If we ſhift the ſcene, and look upwards, towards thoſe whoſe ſituation in life ſeems to place them above the ſorrows of this kind, yet where are they exempt from others? Do not all ranks and conditions of men meet with ſad accidents, and numberleſs calamities in other reſpects, which often make them go heavily all their lives long?

How many fall into chronical infirmities, which render both their days and nights reſtleſs and inſupportable?——How many of the higheſt rank are tore up with ambition, or ſoured with diſappointments; and how many more, from a thouſand ſecret cauſes of diſquiet, pine away in ſilence, and owe their deaths to ſorrow and dejection of heart?—If we caſt our eyes upon the loweſt claſs and condition of life,—the ſcene is more melancholy ſtill.—Millions of our fellow creatures born to no inheritance but poverty and trouble, forced by the neceſſity of their lots to drudgery and painful employments, and hard ſet with that too, to get enough to keep themſelves and families alive.—So that upon the whole, when we have examined the true ſtate and condition of human life, and have made ſome allowances for a few

fugacious, deceitful pleaſures, there is ſcarce any thing to be found which contradicts Job's deſcription of it.——Which ever way we look abroad, we ſee ſome legible characters of what GOD firſt denounced againſt us, "That in "ſorrow we ſhould eat our bread, till we "return to the ground, from whence we were "taken."*

But ſome one will ſay, Why are we thus to be put out of love with human life? To what purpoſe is it to expoſe the dark ſides of it to us, or enlarge upon the infirmities which are natural, and conſequently out of our power to redreſs?

I anſwer, that the ſubject is nevertheleſs of great importance, ſince it is neceſſary every creature ſhould underſtand his preſent ſtate and condition, to put him in mind of behaving ſuitably to it.—Does not an impartial ſurvey of man—the holding up this glaſs to ſhew him his defects and natural infirmities, naturally tend to cure his pride, and cloath him with humility, which is a dreſs that beſt becomes a ſhort-lived and a wretched creature?——Does not the conſideration of the ſhortneſs of our life, convince us of the wiſdom of dedicating ſo ſmall a portion to the great purpoſes of eternity?

Laſtly, When we reflect that this ſpan of life, ſhort as it is, is chequered with ſo many troubles, that there is nothing in this world ſprings up, or can be enjoyed without a mixture of ſorrow, how inſenſibly does it incline us to turn our eyes and affections from ſo gloomy a proſpect, and fix them upon that happier country, where

* *N. B. Moſt of theſe reflections upon the miſeries of life are taken from Woolaſton.*

where afflictions cannot follow us, and where GOD will wipe away all tears from off our faces, for ever and ever? *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON XI.

EVIL-SPEAKING.

JAMES i. 26.

If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.

OF the many duties owing both to GOD and our neighbour, there are ſcarce any men ſo bad, as not to acquit themſelves of ſome, and few ſo good, I fear, as to practiſe all.

Every man ſeems willing enough to compound the matter, and adopt ſo much of the ſyſtem, as will leaſt interfere with his principal and ruling paſſion; and for thoſe parts, which would occaſion a more troubleſome oppoſition, to conſider them as hard ſayings, and ſo leave them for thoſe to practiſe whoſe natural tempers are better ſuited for the ſtruggle. So that a man ſhall be covetous, oppreſſive, revengeful, neither a lover of truth, or common honeſty, and yet, at the ſame time, ſhall be *very* religious, and ſo ſanctified, as not once to fail of paying his morning and evening ſacrifice to GOD. So, on the other hand, a man ſhall live without GOD in the world, have neither any great ſenſe of religion, or indeed pretend to have any, and yet be of niceſt honour, conſcientiouſly juſt and fair in all his dealings. And here it is that men generally betray themſelves, deceiving, as the apoſtle ſays, their own hearts; of which the inſtances are ſo various, in one

one degree or other throughout human life, that one might ſafely ſay, the bulk of mankind live in ſuch a contradiction to themſelves, that there is no character ſo hard to be met with as one which, upon a critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and in every point conſiſtent with itſelf.

If ſuch a contraſt was only obſervable in the different ſtages of a man's life, it would ceaſe to be either a matter of wonder, or a juſt reproach. Age, experience, and much reflection, may naturally enough be ſuppoſed to alter a man's ſenſe of things, and ſo entirely to transform him, that not only in outward appearances, but in the very caſt and turn of his mind, he may be as unlike and different from the man he was twenty or thirty years ago, as he ever was from any thing of his own ſpecies. This, I ſay, is naturally to be accounted for, and in ſome caſes might be praiſeworthy too: but the obſervation is to be made of men in the ſame period of their lives, that in the ſame day, ſometimes in the very ſame action, they are utterly inconſiſtent and irreconcileable with themſelves.—Look at a man in one light, and he ſhall ſeem wiſe, penetrating, diſcreet, and brave: behold him in another point of view, and you ſee a creature all over folly and indiſcretion, weak and timorous, as cowardice and indiſcretion can make him. A man ſhall appear gentle, courteous, and benevolent to all mankind; follow him into his own houſe, may be you ſee a tyrant, moroſe and ſavage to all whoſe happineſs depends upon his kindneſs. A third, in his general behaviour, is found to be generous, diſintereſted, humane and friendly;—hear but the ſad ſtory of the friendleſs orphans, too credulouſly truſting all their little ſubſtance into his hands,

and

and he ſhall appear more ſordid, more pitileſs and unjuſt, than the injured themſelves have bitterneſs to paint him. Another ſhall be charitable to the poor, uncharitable in his cenſures and opinions of all the reſt of the world beſides;—— temperate in his appetites, intemperate in his tongue; ſhall have too much conſcience and religion to cheat the man who truſts him, and perhaps, as far as the buſineſs of debtor and creditor extends, ſhall be juſt and ſcrupulous to the uttermoſt mite; yet in matters of full as great concern, where he is to have the handling of the parties reputation and good name,—the deareſt, the tendereſt property the man has, he will do him irreparable damage, and rob him there without meaſure or pity.——

And this ſeems to be that particular piece of inconſiſtency and contradiction which the text is levelled at; in which the words ſeem ſo pointed, as if St. James had known more flagrant inſtances of this kind of deluſion than what had fallen under the obſervation of any of the reſt of the apoſtles; he being more remarkably vehement and copious upon that ſubject than any other.

Doubtleſs ſome of his converts had been notoriouſly wicked and licentious, in this remorſeleſs practice of defamation and evil-ſpeaking. Perhaps the holy man, tho' ſpotleſs as an angel, (for no character is too ſacred for calumny to blacken) had grievouſly ſuffered himſelf, and, as his bleſſed Maſter foretold him, had been cruelly reviled, and evil *ſpoken* of.

All his labours in the goſpel, his unaffected and perpetual ſolicitude for the preſervation of his flock, his watchings, his faſtings, his poverty, his natural ſimplicity and innocence of life, *all* perhaps were not enough to defend him from this unruly

unruly weapon, ſo full of deadly poiſon. And what in all likelihood might move his ſorrow and indignation more, ſome who ſeemed the moſt devout and zealous of all his converts, were the moſt mercileſs and uncharitable in that reſpect; having a form of godlineſs, full of bitter envyings and ſtrife.

With ſuch it is that he expoſtulates ſo largely in the third chapter of his epiſtle; and there is ſomething in his vivacity, tempered with ſuch affection and concern, as well ſuited the character of an inſpired man. My brethren, ſays the apoſtle, theſe things ought not to be.—The wiſdom that is from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocriſy. The wiſdom from above—that heavenly religion which I have preached to you, is pure, alike and conſiſtent with itſelf in all its parts; like its great Author, 'tis univerſally kind and benevolent in all caſes and circumſtances. Its firſt glad tidings were peace upon earth, good will towards men; its chief corner ſtone, its moſt diſtinguiſhing character is love, that kind principle which brought it down, in the pure exerciſe of which conſiſts the chief employment of heaven from whence it came. But this practice, my brethren, cometh not from above, but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh, full of confuſion and every evil work. Reflect then a moment; can a fountain ſend forth, at the ſame place, ſweet water and bitter? can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either a vine, figs? Lay your hands upon your hearts, and let your conſciences ſpeak.—Ought not the ſame juſt principle which reſtrains you from cruelty and wrong in one caſe, equally to with-hold you from it in another?—Should not charity and good will, like the principle

ciple of life, circulating through the ſmalleſt veſſels in every member, ought it not to operate as regularly upon you, throughout, as well upon your words, as upon your actions?

If man is wiſe and endued with knowledge, let him ſhew it, out of a good converſation, with meekneſs of wiſdom. But—if any man amongſt you ſeemeth to be religious—ſeemeth to be,—for truly religious he cannot be,—and bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.—This is the full force of St. James's reaſoning; upon which I have dwelt the more, it being the foundation upon which is grounded this clear deciſion of the matter left us in the text. In which the apoſtle ſeems to have ſet the two characters of a ſaint and a ſlanderer at ſuch variance, that one would have thought they could never have had a heart to have met together again. But there are no alliances too ſtrange for this world.—How many may we obſerve every day, even of the gentler ſex as well as our own, who, without conviction of doing much wrong, in the midſt of a full career of calumny and defamation, riſe up punctual at the ſtated hour of prayer, leave the cruel ſtory half untold till they return,—go,—and kneel down before the throne of heaven, thank GOD that he had not made them like others, and that his Holy Spirit had enabled them to perform the duties of the day, in ſo Chriſtian and conſcientious a manner!

This deluſive itch for ſlander, too common in all ranks of people, whether to gratify a little ungenerous reſentment;—whether oftner out of a principle of levelling, from a narrowneſs and poverty of ſoul, ever impatient of merit and ſuperiority in others; whether a mean ambition,

or

or the inſatiate luſt of being witty, (a talent in which ill-nature and malice are no ingredients); —or, laſtly, whether from a natural cruelty of diſpoſition, abſtracted from all views and conſiderations of ſelf: to which one, or whether to all jointly, we are indebted for this contagious malady; thus much is certain, from whatever ſeeds it ſprings, the growth and progreſs of it are as deſtructive to, as they are unbecoming, a civilized people. To paſs a hard and ill-natured reflection, upon an undeſigning action; to invent, or, which is equally bad, to propagate a vexatious report without colour and grounds; to plunder an innocent man of his character and good name, a jewel which perhaps he has ſtarved himſelf to purchaſe, and probably would hazard his life to ſecure; to rob him at the ſame time of his happineſs and peace of mind; perhaps his bread,—the bread, may be, of a virtuous family; and all this as Solomon ſays of the madman, who caſteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, and ſaith, Am I not in ſport? all this, out of wantonneſs, and oftner from worſe motives; the whole appears ſuch a complication of badneſs, as requires no words or warmth of fancy to aggravate. Pride, treachery, envy, hypocriſy, malice, cruelty and ſelf-love, may have been ſaid, in one ſhape or other, to have occaſioned all the frauds and miſchiefs that ever happened in the world: but the chances againſt a coincidence of them all in one perſon are ſo many, that one would have ſuppoſed the character of a common ſlanderer as rare and difficult a production in nature, as that of a great genius, which ſeldom happens above once in an age.

But whatever was the caſe, when St. James wrote his epiſtle, we have been very ſucceſsful in later

later days, and have found out the art, by a proper management of light and ſhade, to compound all theſe vices together, ſo as to give body and ſtrength to the whole, whilſt no one but a diſcerning artiſt is able to diſcover the labours that join in finiſhing the picture.—And indeed, like many other bad originals in the world,—it ſtands in need of all the diſguiſe it has.—For who could be enamoured of a character, made up of ſo loathſome a compound,—could they behold it naked,—in its crooked and deformed ſhape,—with all its natural and deteſted infirmities laid open to public view?

And therefore, it were to be wiſhed, that one could do in this malignant caſe of the mind,—what is generally done for the public good, in the more malignant and epidemical cafes of the body,—that is,—when they are found infectious,—to write a hiſtory of the diſtemper,—and aſcertain all the ſymptoms of the malady, ſo that every one might know, whom he might venture to go near, with tolerable ſafety to himſelf.—But, alas! the ſymptoms of this appear in ſo many ſtrange and contradictory ſhapes, and vary ſo wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be claſſed,—or reduced to any one regular ſyſtem.

Ten thouſand are the vehicles in which this deadly poiſon is prepared and communicated to the world;—and by ſome artful hands, 'tis done by ſo ſubtile and nice an infuſion, that it is not to be taſted or diſcovered, but by its effects.

How frequently is the honeſty and integrity of a man diſpoſed of, by a ſmile or a ſhrug?—How many good and generous actions have been ſunk into oblivion, by a diſtruſtful look,—or ſtamped with the imputation of proceeding from bad

bad motives, by a myſterious and ſeaſonable whiſper?

Look into companies of thoſe whoſe gentle natures ſhould diſarm them,—we ſhall find no better account.——How large a portion of chaſtity is ſent out of the world by diſtant hints,——nodded away and cruelly winked into ſuſpicion, by the envy of thoſe, who are paſſed all temptation of it themſelves?—How often does the reputation of a helpleſs creature bleed by a report—which the party, who is at the pains to propagate it, beholds with much pity and fellow-feeling,—that ſhe is heartily ſorry for it,——hopes in GOD it is not true?—however, as Archbiſhop Tillotſon wittily obſerves upon it, is reſolved, in the mean time, to give the report her paſs, that at leaſt it may have fair play to take its fortune in the world,—to be believed or not, according to the charity of thoſe, into whoſe hands it ſhall happen to fall?

So fruitful is this vice in variety of expedients, to ſatiate as well as to diſguiſe itſelf. But if theſe ſmoother weapons cut ſo ſore,—what ſhall we ſay of open and unbluſhing ſcandal—ſubjected to no caution—tied down to no reſtraints?—If the one, like an arrow ſhot in the dark, does nevertheleſs ſo much ſecret miſchief,——this, like the peſtilence, which rageth at noon day, ſweeps all before it, levelling without diſtinction the good and the bad; a thouſand fall beſide it, and ten thouſand on its right hand,—they fall,—ſo rent and torn in this tender part of them, ſo unmercifully butchered, as ſometimes never to recover either the wounds,—or the anguiſh of heart,—which they have occaſioned.—

But there is nothing ſo bad which will not admit of ſomething to be ſaid in its defence.

And

And here it may be aſked,——Whether the inconveniences and ill effects which the world feels,—from the licentiouſneſs of this practice —are not ſufficiently counterbalanced by the real influence it has upon men's lives and conduct?—That if there was no evil-ſpeaking in the world, thouſands would be encouraged to do ill,—and would ruſh into many indecorums, like a horſe into the battle,—were they ſure to eſcape the tongues of men.

That if we take a general view of the world, —we ſhall find, that a great deal of virtue,—at leaſt of the outward appearance of it,—is not ſo much from any fixed principle, as the terror of what the world will ſay,—and the liberty it will take upon the occaſions we ſhall give.

That if we deſcend to particulars, numbers are every day taking more pains to be well ſpoken of, —than what would actually enable them to live ſo as to deſerve it.

That there are many of both ſexes who can ſupport life well enough without honour or chaſtity,—who, without reputation, (which is but the opinion which the world has of the matter,) would hide their heads in ſhame, and ſink down in utter deſpair of happineſs.—No doubt the tongue is a weapon which does chaſtiſe many indecorums which the laws of men will not reach, —and keeps many in awe,—whom conſcience will not,—and where the caſe is indiſputably flagrant,—the ſpeaking of it in ſuch words as it deſerves,—ſcarce comes within the prohibition.—In many caſes 'tis hard to expreſs ourſelves ſo as to fix a diſtinction betwixt oppoſite characters,—and ſometimes it may be as much a debt we owe to virtue, and as great a piece of juſtice to expoſe a vicious character, and paint it in its proper colours,

lours,—as it is to ſpeak well of the deſerving, and deſcribe his particular virtues.—And indeed, when we inflict this puniſhment upon the bad, merely out of principle, and without indulgences to any private paſſion of our own,—'tis a caſe which happens ſo ſeldom, that one might venture to except it.

However, to thoſe, who in this objection are really concerned for the cauſe of virtue, I cannot help recommending what would much more effectually ſerve her intereſt, and be a ſurer token of their zeal and attachment to her. And that is,—in all ſuch plain inſtances, where it ſeems to be duty to fix a diſtinction between the good and the bad,—to let their actions ſpeak it inſtead of their words, or at leaſt to let them both ſpeak one language. We all of us talk ſo loud againſt vicious characters, and are ſo unanimous in our cry againſt them,—that an unexperienced man, who only truſted his ears, would imagine the whole world was in an uproar about it, and that mankind were all aſſociating together, to hunt vice utterly out of the world.—Shift the ſcene, and let him behold the reception which vice meets with,—he will ſee the conduct and behaviour of the world towards it ſo oppoſite to their declarations,—he will find all he heard ſo contradicted by what he ſaw,—as to leave him in doubt which of his ſenſes he is to truſt,—or in which of the two caſes mankind were really in earneſt. Was there virtue enough in the world to make a general ſtand againſt this contradiction,—that is—was every one who deſerved to be ill ſpoken of—ſure to be ill looked on—too; was it a certain conſequence of the loſs of a man's character,—to loſe his friends,—to loſe the advantages

vantages of his birth and fortune,—and thenceforth be univerſally ſhunned, univerſally ſlighted.

Was no quality a ſhelter againſt the indecorums of the other ſex, but was every woman without diſtinction,—who had juſtly forfeited her reputation,—from that moment was ſhe ſure to forfeit likewiſe all claim to civility and reſpect.—

Or, in a word,—could it be eſtabliſhed as a law in our ceremonial,—that wherever characters in either ſex were become notorious,—it ſhould be deemed infamous, either to pay or receive a viſit from them, and that the door ſhould be ſhut againſt them in all public places, till they had ſatisfied the world, by giving teſtimony of a better life.—A few ſuch plain and honeſt maxims, faithfully put in practice,—would force us upon ſome degree of reformation. Till this is done,—it avails little that we have no mercy upon them with our tongues, ſince they eſcape without feeling any other inconvenience.

We all cry out that the world is corrupt,—and I fear too juſtly;—but we never reflect, what we have to thank for it, and that it is our open countenance of vice, which gives the lye to our private cenſures of it, which is its chief protection and encouragement.—To thoſe, however, who ſtill believe, that evil-ſpeaking is ſome terror to evil-doers, one may anſwer, as a great man has done upon the occaſion,—that after all our exhortations againſt it—'tis not to be feared, but that there will be evil-ſpeaking enough left in the world to chaſtiſe the guilty,—and we may ſafely truſt them to an ill-natured world, that there will be no failure of juſtice upon this ſcore.—The paſſions of men are pretty ſevere executioners, and to them let us leave this ungrateful taſk,—and rather ourſelves endeavour to cultivate

that

that more friendly one, recommended by the apoſtle,—of letting all bitterneſs and wrath, and clamour, and evil-ſpeaking, be put away from us,——of being kind to one another,——tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as GOD for CHRIST's ſake forgave us. *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON XII.

JOSEPH'S Hiſtory, conſidered.

FORGIVENESS of INJURIES.

GENESIS i. 15.

And when Joſeph's brethren ſaw that their father was dead, they ſaid, Joſeph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

THERE are few inſtances of the exerciſe of particular virtues which ſeem harder to attain to, or which appear more amiable and engaging in themſelves, than thoſe of moderation and the forgiveneſs of injuries; and when the temptations againſt them happen to be heightened by the bitterneſs of a provocation on one hand and the fairneſs of an opportunity to retaliate on the other, the inſtances *then* are truly great and heroic. The words of the text, (which are the conſultation of the ſons of Jacob amongſt themſelves upon their father Iſrael's death, when, becauſe it was in Joſeph's power to revenge the deadly injury they had formerly done him, they concluded in courſe, that it was in his intention, will lead us to a beautiful example of this kind in the character and behaviour of Joſeph conſequent thereupon; and as it ſeems a perfect and very engaging pattern of forbearance, it may not be improper to make it ſerve for the ground-work of a diſcourſe

a diſcourſe upon that ſubject.—The whole tranſaction, from the firſt occaſion given by Joſeph in his youth, to this laſt act of remiſſion, at the concluſion of his life, may be ſaid to be a maſterpiece of hiſtory. There is not only in the manner throughout ſuch a happy though uncommon mixture of ſimplicity and grandeur, which is a double character ſo hard to be united, that it is ſeldom to be met with in compoſitions merely human;--but it is likewiſe related with the greateſt variety of tender and affecting circumſtances, which would afford matter for reflections uſeful for the conduct of almoſt every part and ſtage of a man's life. But as the words of the text, as well as the intention and compaſs of this diſcourſe, particularly confine me to ſpeak only to one point, namely, the forgiveneſs of injuries, it will be proper only to conſider ſuch circumſtances of the ſtory as will place this inſtance of it in its juſt light; and then proceed to make a more general uſe of the great example of moderation and forbearance which it ſets before us.

It ſeems ſtrange, at firſt ſight, that after the ſons of Jacob had fallen into Joſeph's power, when they were forced by the ſoreneſs of the famine to go down into Egypt to buy corn, and had found him too good a man even to expoſtulate with them for an injury, which he ſeemed then to have digeſted, and piouſly to have reſolved into the over-ruling providence of GOD, for the preſervation of much people, how they could ever after queſtion the uprightneſs of his intentions, or entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion that his reconciliation was diſſembled. Would not one have imagined, that the man who had diſcovered ſuch a goodneſs of ſoul, that he ſought where to weep, becauſe he could not bear the ſtruggles of

a counterfeited harſhneſs, could ever be ſuſpected afterwards of intending a real one?—and that he only waited till their father Iſrael's death to requite them all the evil which they had done unto him. What ſtill adds to this difficulty is, that his affectionate manner in making himſelf known to them;—his goodneſs in forbearing, not only to reproach them for the injury they had formerly done him, but extenuating and excuſing the fault to themſelves, his comforting and ſpeaking kindly to them, and ſeconding all with the tendereſt marks of an undiſguiſed forgiveneſs, and falling upon their necks, and weeping aloud, that all the houſe of Pharaoh heard him;—that, moreover, this behaviour of Joſeph could not appear to them to be the effect of any warm and ſudden tranſport, which might as ſuddenly give way to other reflections, but that it evidently ſprung from a ſettled principle of uncommon generoſity in his nature, which was above the temptation of making uſe of an opportunity of revenge, which the courſe of GOD'S providence had put into his hands for better purpoſes; and what might ſtill ſeem to confirm this, was the evidence of his actions to them afterwards, in bringing them and all their houſhold up out of Canaan, and placing them near him in the land of Goſhen, the richeſt part of Egypt, where they had ſo many years experience of his love and kindneſs. And yet it is plain all this did not clear his motive from ſuſpicion, or at leaſt themſelves of ſome apprehenſions of a change in his conduct towards them. And was it not that the whole tranſaction was wrote under the direction of the ſpirit of truth, and that other hiſtorians concur in doing juſtice to Joſeph's character, and ſpeak of him as a compaſſionate and merciful man, one would be apt

you

you will ſay, to imagine here, that Moſes might poſſibly have omitted ſome circumſtances of Joſeph's behaviour, which had alarmed his brethren, betwixt the time of his firſt reconciliation and that of their father's death.—For they could not be ſuſpicious of his intentions without ſome cauſe, and fear where no fear was.——But does not a guilty conſcience often do ſo? and though it has the grounds, yet wants the power to think itſelf ſafe.

And could we look into the hearts of thoſe who know they deſerve ill, we ſhould find many an inſtance, where a kindneſs from an injured hand, where there was leaſt reaſon to expect one, has ſtruck deeper, and touched the heart with a degree of remorſe and concern, which perhaps no ſeverity or reſentment could have reached. This reflection will in ſome meaſure help to explain this difficulty which occurs in the ſtory. For it is obſervable, that when the injury they had done their brother was firſt committed, and the fact was freſh upon their minds and moſt likely to have filled them with a ſenſe of guilt, we find no acknowledgment or complaint to one another of ſuch a load, as one might imagine it had laid upon them; and from that event, through a long courſe of years to the time they had gone down to Egypt, we read not once of any ſorrow or compunction of heart which they had felt during all that time, for what they had done. They had artfully impoſed upon their parent—(and as men are ingenious caſuiſts in their own affairs), they had, probably, as artfully impoſed upon their own conſciences;—and poſſibly had never impartially reflected upon the action, or conſidered it in its juſt light, till the many acts of their brother's love and kindneſs had brought it before them,

with all the circumſtances of aggravation which his behaviour would naturally give it. They then began maturely to conſider what they had done;—that they had firſt undeſervedly hated him in his childhood for that, which, if it was a ground of complaint, ought rather to have been charged upon the indiſcretion of the parent, than conſidered as a fault in him. That upon a more juſt examination, and a better knowledge of their brother, they had wanted even that pretence.—It was not a blind partiality which ſeemed firſt to have directed their father's affection to him,—though then they thought ſo,—for doubtleſs ſo much goodneſs and benevolence as ſhone forth in his nature, now that he was a man, could not lie all of it ſo deep concealed in his youth, but the ſagacity of a parent's eye would diſcover it; and that in courſe their enmity towards him was founded upon that which ought to have won their eſteem.—That if he had incautiouſly added envy to their ill-will, in reporting his dreams which preſaged his future greatneſs; it was but the indiſcretion of a youth unpractiſed in the world, who had not yet found out the art of diſſembling his hopes and expectations, and was ſcarce arrived at an age to comprehend there was ſuch a thing in the world as envy and ambition;—that if ſuch offences in a brother ſo fairly carried their own excuſes with them, what could they ſay for themſelves, when they conſidered it was for this they had almoſt unanimouſly conſpired to rob him of his life?—and though they were happily reſtrained from ſhedding his blood upon Reuben's remonſtrance, that they had nevertheleſs all the guilt of the intention to anſwer for. That, whatever motive it was, which then ſtayed their hands, their conſciences told them, it could not be

good

good one, ſince they had changed the ſentence for one no leſs cruel in itſelf, and what to an ingenuous nature was worſe than death, to be ſold for a ſlave.—The one was common to all,—the other only to the unfortunate. That it was not compaſſion which then took place, for had there been any way open to that, his tears and entreaties muſt have found it, when they ſaw the anguiſh of his ſoul, when he beſought and they would not hear.—That if aught ſtill could heighten the remorſe of baniſhing a youth, without provocation, for ever from his country, and the protection of his parent, to be expoſed naked to the buffetings of the world, and the rough hand of ſome mercileſs maſter, they would find it in this reflection, "That the many afflictions and hardſhips which they might naturally have expected would overtake the lad, conſequent upon this action, had actually fallen upon him."

That beſides the anguiſh of ſuſpected virtue, he had felt that of a priſon, where he had long lain neglected in a friendleſs condition; and where the affliction of it was rendered ſtill ſharper by the daily expectation of being remembered by Pharaoh's chief butler, and the diſappointment of finding himſelf ungratefully forgotten.—And though Moſes tells us, that he found favour in the ſight of the keeper of the priſon, yet the Pſalmiſt acquaints us, that his ſufferings were ſtill grievous;——*That his feet were hurt with fetters*, and the iron entered *even into his ſoul*. And no doubt, his brethren thought the ſenſe of their injury muſt have entered at the ſame time, and was then rivetted and fixed in his mind for ever.

It is natural to imagine they argued and reflected in this manner; and there ſeems no neceſſity of ſeeking for the reaſon of their uneaſineſs and diſ-

truſt in Joſeph's conduct, or any other external cauſe, ſince the inward workings of their own minds will eaſily account for the evils they apprehended. —— A ſeries of benefits and kindneſſes from the man they had injured, gradually heightened the idea of their own guilt, till at length they could not conceive, how the treſpaſs could be forgiven them;—it appeared with ſuch freſh circumſtances of aggravation, that though they were convinced his reſentment ſlept, yet they thought it only ſlept, and was likely ſome time or other to awake, and moſt probably then, that their father was dead, when the conſideration of involving him in his revenge had ceaſed, and all the duty and compaſſion he owed to the grey hairs and happineſs of a parent was diſcharged, and buried with him.

This they expreſs in the conſultation held amongſt themſelves in the words of the text: and in the following verſe, we find them accordingly ſending to him to depreciate the evil they dreaded; and either, becauſe they thought their father's name more powerful than their own, in this application—or rather, that they might not commit a freſh injury in ſeeming to ſuſpect his ſincerity, they pretend their father's direction; for we read they ſent meſſengers unto Joſeph ſaying, Thy father did command before he died, ſaying,—ſo ſhall ye ſay unto Joſeph,——"Forgive, I pray thee now, the treſpaſs of thy brethren and their ſin, for they did unto thee evil: and now we pray thee, forgive the treſpaſs of the ſervants of the GOD of thy father." The addreſs was not without art, and was conceived in ſuch words as ſeemed to ſuggeſt an argument in their favour,—as if it would not become him, who was but a fellow-ſervant of their father's GOD,

GOD, to harbour revenge, or uſe the power their father's GOD had given him againſt his children. Nor was there a reaſon in any thing, but the fears of a guilty conſcience to apprehend it, as appears from the reception which the addreſs met, which was ſuch as beſpoke an uncommon goodneſs of nature; for when they thus ſpake unto him,——the hiſtorian ſays, he wept. Sympathy for the ſorrow and diſtreſs of ſo many ſons of his father, now all in his power,—pain at ſo open and ingenuous a confeſſion of their guilt,—concern and pity for the long puniſhment they muſt have endured by ſo ſtubborn a remorſe which ſo many years ſeemed not to have diminiſhed,—the affecting idea of their condition, which had ſeemed to reduce them to the neceſſity of holding up their hands for mercy, when they had loſt their protector —— ſo many tender paſſions ſtruggling together at once overcame him;—he burſt into tears, which ſpoke what no language could attempt. It will be needleſs therefore to enlarge any further upon this incident, which furniſhes us with ſo beautiful a picture of a compaſſionate and forgiving temper, that I think no words can heighten it;—but rather let us endeavour to find out by what helps and reaſoning the patriarch might be ſuppoſed to attain to ſo exalted and engaging a virtue. Perhaps you will ſay, "That one ſo thoroughly convinced, as Joſeph ſeemed to be, of the over-ruling providence of GOD, which ſo evidently makes uſe of the malice and paſſions of men, and turns them as inſtruments in his hands to work his own righteouſneſs, and bring about his eternal decrees,—and of which his own hiſtory was ſo plain an inſtance, could not have far to ſeek for an

argument to forgiveneſs, or feel much ſtruggle in ſtifling an inclination againſt it.——But let any man lay his hand upon his heart and ſay, how often, in inſtances where anger and revenge had ſeized him, has this doctrine come in to his aid?—In the bitterneſs of an affront, how often has it calmed his paſſions, and checked the fury of his reſentment?—True and univerſally believed as the doctrine is amongſt us, it ſeldom does this ſervice, though ſo well ſuited for it, and, like ſome wiſe ſtatute, never executed or thought of, though in full force, lies as unheeded as if it was not in being.

'Tis plain 'twas otherwiſe in the preſent inſtance, where Joſeph ſeems to acknowledge the influence it had upon him, in his declaration, —"*That* it was not they, but GOD who ſent him." And does not this virtue ſhine the brighteſt in ſuch a pious application of the perſuaſion to ſo benevolent a purpoſe?

Without derogating from the merit of his forbearance, he might be ſuppoſed to have caſt an eye upon the change and uncertainty of human affairs which he had ſeen himſelf, and which had convinced him we were all in one another's power by turns, and ſtand in need of one another's pity and compaſſion:——and that to reſtrain the cruelties, and ſtop the inſolences of men's reſentments, GOD has ſo ordered it in the courſe of his providence, that very often in this world—— our revenges return upon our own heads, and men's violent dealing upon their own pates.

That beſides theſe conſiderations,—that in generouſly forgiving an enemy, he was the trueſt friend to his own character, and ſhould gain more to it by ſuch an inſtance of ſubduing his ſpirit,

ſpirit, than if he had taken a city.——The brave know only how to forgive;—it is the moſt refined and generous pitch of virtue, human nature can arrive at.—* Cowards have done good and kind actions,——cowards have even fought—nay ſometimes even conquered;——but a coward never forgave.——It is not in his nature;——the power of doing it flows only from a ſtrength and greatneſs of ſoul, conſcious of its own force and ſecurity, and above the little temptations of reſenting every fruitleſs attempt to interrupt its happineſs. Moreover, ſetting aſide all conſiderations of his character, in paſſing by an injury, he was the trueſt friend likewiſe to his own happineſs and peace of mind; he never felt that fretful ſtorm of paſſions which hurry men on to acts of revenge, or ſuffered thoſe pangs of horror which purſue it.—Thus he might poſſibly argue, and no further;—for want of a better foundation and better helps, he could raiſe the building no higher;—to carry it upwards to its perfection we muſt call to our aid that more ſpiritual and refined doctrine introduced upon it by CHRIST; namely, to forgive a brother, not only to ſeven times, but to ſeventy times ſeven—that is, without limitation.

In this, the excellency of the goſpel is ſaid by ſome one, to appear with a remarkable advantage; "That a Chriſtian is as much diſpoſed to love and ſerve you, when your enemy, as the mere moral man can be, when he is your friend."——This, no doubt, is the tendency of his religion;—but how often, or in what degrees it ſucceeds;—how nearly the practice keeps pace with the theory, the All-wiſe ſearcher into the hearts of men, alone is able to determine. But

* *Chriſtian hero.*

it is to be feared, that ſuch great effects are not ſo ſenſibly felt, as a ſpeculative man would expect from ſuch powerful motives; and there is many a Chriſtian ſociety, which would be glad to compound amongſt themſelves for ſome leſſer degrees of perfection on one hand, were they ſure to be exempted, on the other, from the bad effects of thoſe fretful paſſions which are ever taking, as well as ever giving the occaſions of ſtrife: the beginnings of which, Solomon aptly compares to the letting out of waters; the opening a breach which no one can be ſure to ſtop, till it has proceeded to the moſt fatal events.

With juſtice, therefore, might the ſon of Syrach conclude, concerning pride, that ſecret ſtream which adminiſters to the overflowings of reſentments, that it was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman: that the one did not become his ſtation, and that the other was deſtructive to all the happineſs he was intended to receive from it. How miſerably, then, muſt thoſe men turn tyrants againſt themſelves, as well as others, who grow ſplenetic and revengeful, not only upon the little unavoidable oppoſitions and offences they muſt meet with in the commerce of the world, but upon thoſe which only reach them by report; and accordingly torment their little ſouls with meditating how to return the injury, before they are certain they have received one? Whether this eager ſenſibility of wrongs and reſentment ariſes from that general cauſe to which the ſon of Syrach ſeems to reduce all fierce anger and paſſion; or whether to a certain ſourneſs of temper, which ſtands in every body's way, and therefore ſubject to be often hurt; from whichever cauſe the diſorder ſprings, the advice of the author of the book of Eccleſiaſticus

aſticus is proper: "Admoniſh a friend, ſays he, it may be he hath not done it; and if he have, that he do it not again. Admoniſh thy friend, it may be he hath not ſaid it: and if he have, that he ſpeak it not again. There is that ſlippeth in his ſpeech, but not from his heart: and who is he, who hath not offended with his tongue?"

I cannot help taking notice here of a certain ſpecies of forgiveneſs which is ſeldom enforced or thought of, and yet is no way below our regard. I mean the forgiveneſs of thoſe, if we may be allowed the expreſſion, whom we have injured ourſelves. One would think that the difficulty of forgiving could only reſt on the ſide of him who has received the wrong; but the truth of the fact is often otherwiſe. The conſciouſneſs of having provoked another's reſentment, often excites the aggreſſor to keep beforehand with the man he has hurt, and not only to hate him for the evil he expects in return, but even to purſue him down, and put it out of his power to make repriſals.

The baſeneſs of this is ſuch, that it is ſufficient to make the ſame obſervation which was made upon the crime of parricide amongſt the Grecians: — it was ſo black, — their legiſlators did not ſuppoſe it could be committed, and therefore made no law to puniſh it.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

DUTY of ſetting Bounds to our DESIRES.

2 KINGS iv. 13.

And he ſaid unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou haſt been careful for us with all this care; —what is to be done for thee?—wouldeſt thou be ſpoken for to the king, or the captain of the hoſt? And ſhe anſwered, I dwell among mine own people.

THE firſt part of the text is the words which the prophet Eliſha puts into the mouth of his ſervant Gehazi, as a meſſage of thanks to the woman of Shunem for her great kindneſs and hoſpitality, of which, after the acknowledgment of his juſt ſenſe, which Gehazi is bid to deliver in the words,——" Behold, thou haſt been careful for us with all this care;"—— he directs him to inquire in what manner he may beſt make a return in diſcharge of the obligation; ——" What ſhall be done for thee; Wouldeſt thou be ſpoken for to the king, or the captain of the hoſt?" The laſt part of the text is the Shunamite's anſwer, which implies a refuſal of the honour or advantage which the prophet intended to bring upon her by ſuch an application, which ſhe indirectly expreſſes in her contentment and ſatisfaction, with what ſhe enjoyed in her preſent ſtation; " I dwell amongſt mine own people." This inſtance of ſelf-denial in the

the Shunamite, is but properly the introduction to her ſtory, and gives riſe to that long and very pathetic tranſaction which follows, in the ſupernatural grant of a child, which GOD had many years denied her;—the affecting loſs of him as ſoon as he was grown up—and his reſtoration to life by Eliſha, after he had been ſome time dead; the whole of which, though extremely intereſting, and form ſuch incidents as would afford ſufficient matter for inſtruction, yet as it will not fall within the intention of this diſcourſe, I ſhall beg leave, at this time, barely to conſider theſe previous circumſtances of it, to which the text confines me, upon which I ſhall enlarge with ſuch reflections as occur, and then proceed to that practical uſe and exhortation, which will naturally fall from it.

We find that after Eliſha had reſcued the diſtreſſed widow and her two ſons from the hands of the creditor, by the miraculous multiplication of her oil; that he paſſed on to Shunem, where we read, was a great woman, and ſhe conſtrained him to eat bread; and ſo it was, that as often as he paſſed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. The ſacred hiſtorian ſpeaks barely of her temporal condition and ſtation in life,—"That ſhe was a great woman;" but deſcribes not the more material part of her, her virtues and character, becauſe they were more evidently to be diſcovered from the tranſaction itſelf, from which it appears, that ſhe was not only wealthy, but likewiſe charitable, and of a very conſiderate turn of mind. For after many repeated invitations and entertainments at her houſe, finding his occaſions called him to a frequent paſſage that way;—ſhe moves her huſband to ſet up and furniſh a lodging for him, with all the conveniencies which the

the ſimplicity of thoſe times required: "And ſhe ſaid unto her huſband, Behold now I perceive that this is an holy man of GOD, which paſſeth by us continually; let us make him a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us ſet for him there a bed, and a table, and a ſtool, and a candleſtick; and it ſhall be when he cometh to us, that he ſhall turn in thither."—She perceived he was a holy man,—ſhe had had many opportunities, as he paſſed by them continually, of obſerving his behaviour and deportment, which ſhe had carefully remarked, and ſaw plainly what he was. That the ſanctity and ſimplicity of his manners,——— the ſeverity of his life,—his zeal for the religion of his GOD, and the uncommon fervency of his devotion, when he worſhipped before him, which ſeemed his whole buſineſs and employment upon earth;—all beſpoke him not a man of this world, but one whoſe heart and affections were fixed upon another object, which was dearer and more important to him. But as ſuch outward appearances may, and often have been counterfeited, ſo that the actions of a man are certainly the only interpreters to be relied on, whether ſuch colours are true or falſe;—ſo ſhe had heard that all was of a piece there, and that he was throughout conſiſtent: that he had never, in any one inſtance of his life, acted as if he had any views in the affairs of this world, in which he had never intereſted himſelf at all, but where the glory of his GOD, or the good and preſervation of his fellow creatures at firſt inclined him:—that in a late inſtance, before he came to Shunem, he had done one of the kindeſt and moſt charitable actions that a good man could have done, in aſſiſting the widow and fatherleſs;—and as the fact was ſingular, and had juſt happened

happened before her knowledge of him, no doubt ſhe had heard the ſtory with all the tender circumſtances which a true report would give it in his favour; namely, that a certain woman, whoſe huſband was lately dead, and had left her with her children in a very helpleſs condition—very deſtitute—and what was ſtill worſe, charged with a debt ſhe was not able to pay,—that her creditor bore exceeding hard upon her, and finding her little worth in ſubſtance, was coming to take the advantage which the law allowed of ſeizing her two ſons for his bondſmen;—ſo that ſhe had not only loſt her huſband, which had made her miſerable enough already, but was going to be bereaved of her children, which were the only comfort and ſupport of her life; that upon her coming to Eliſha with this ſad ſtory, he was touched with compaſſion for her misfortunes, and had uſed all the power and intereſt which he had with his GOD to relieve and befriend her, which in an unheard of manner, by the miraculous increaſe of her oil, which was the only ſubſtance ſhe had left, he had ſo bountifully effected, as not only to diſentangle her from her difficulties in paying the debt, but withal, what was ſtill more generous, to enable her to live comfortably the remainder of her days. She conſidered, that charity and compaſſion was ſo leading a virtue, and had ſuch an influence upon every other part of a man's character, as to be a ſufficient proof, by itſelf, of the inward diſpoſition and goodneſs of the heart; but that ſo engaging an inſtance of it as this, exerciſed in ſo kind and ſeaſonable a manner, was a demonſtration of his,—and that he was in truth what outward circumſtances beſpoke, a holy man of GOD.—As the Shunamite's principle and motive for her hoſpitality to Eliſha

Eliſha was juſt, as it ſprung from an idea of the worth and merit of her gueſt, ſo likewiſe was the manner of doing it kind and conſiderate. It is obſervable, ſhe does not ſolicit her huſband to aſſign him an apartment in her own houſe, but to build him a chamber in the wall apart:—ſhe conſidered,—that true piety wanted no witneſſes, and was always moſt at eaſe when moſt private;—that the tumult and diſtraction of a large family were not fit for the ſilent meditations of ſo holy a man, who would perpetually there meet with ſomething either to interrupt his devotion, or offend the purity of his manners;--that, moreover, under ſuch an independent roof, where he could take ſhelter as often as his occaſions required, ſhe thought he might taſte the pleaſure which was natural to man, in poſſeſſing ſomething like what he could call his own,—and, what is no ſmall part of conferring a favour, he would ſcarce feel the weight of it, or at leaſt much ſeldomer in this manner, than where a daily invitation and repetition of the kindneſs perpetually put him in mind of his obligation. If any thing could ſtill add to this—it was—that it did not appear to be the dry offer of a faint civility, but that it came directly from the heart. There is a nicety in honeſt minds, which *will* not accept of a cold and ſuſpected offer,—and even when it appears to be ſincere and truly meant, there is a modeſty in true merit which knows not how to accept it; and no doubt ſhe had one, if not both theſe difficulties to conquer in their turns.—For we read, that ſhe conſtrained him, and in all likelihood forced his acceptance of it with all the warmth and friendly openneſs of a humane and hoſpitable temper.

It

It is with benefits as with injuries in this reſpect, that we do not ſo much weigh the accidental good or evil they do us, as that which they were deſigned to do us.—That is, we conſider no part of them ſo much as their intention; and the prophet's behaviour conſequent upon this, ſhews he beheld it through this medium, or in ſome ſuch advantageous light as I have placed it.

There is no burden ſo heavy to a grateful mind, as a debt of kindneſs unpaid;—and we may believe Eliſha felt it ſo, from the earneſt deſire which he had, upon the immediate receipt of this, to diſcharge himſelf of it, which he expreſſes in the text in the warmeſt manner;—"Behold, thou haſt been careful for us with all this care:—what ſhall be done for thee? Wouldſt thou be ſpoken for to the king, or the captain of his hoſt?"—There is a degree of honeſt impatience in the words, ſuch as was natural to a good man, who would not be behindhand with his benefactor.—But there is one thing which may ſeem ſtrange at firſt ſight, that as her ſtation and condition in life was ſuch, that ſhe appeared rather to have abounded already than ſtood in want of any thing in this world which ſuch an application could ſupply,—why the prophet ſhould not rather have propoſed ſome ſpiritual advantage, which, as it would better have become the ſanctity of his character on the one hand, ſo, on the other, it would have done a more real and laſting ſervice to his friend.

But we are to reflect, that in returning favours, we act differently from what we do in conferring them;—in the one caſe, we ſimply conſider what is beſt,—in the other, what is moſt acceptable. The reaſon is, that we have a right to act according to our own ideas of what will do the

the party moſt good, in the caſe where we beſtow a favour:—but where we return one, we loſe this right, and act according to his conceptions who has obliged us, and endeavour to repay in ſuch a manner as we think is moſt likely to be accepted in diſcharge of the obligation.—So that, though we are not to imagine Eliſha could be wanting in religious duties, as well as wiſhes to ſo hoſpitable a friend, we may yet ſuppoſe, he was directed here by this principle of equity,—and that, in reflecting in what manner he ſhould requite his benefactreſs, he had conſidered, that to one of her affluent condition, who had all the reaſonable comforts of an independent life,—if there was any paſſion yet unſatisfied, it muſt certainly be ambition: that though in general it was an irregular appetite, which in moſt caſes 'twas dangerous to gratify, yet, in effect, 'twas only ſo far criminal, as the power which is acquired was perverted to bad and vicious purpoſes, which it was not likely to be here, from the ſpecimen ſhe had already given of her diſpoſition, which ſhewed, that if ſhe did wiſh for an increaſe of wealth and honour, ſhe wiſhed it only as it would enable her more generouſly to extend her arm in kind offices, and increaſe the power as well as the opportunities of doing good.

In juſtice to Eliſha's motive, which muſt have been good, we muſt ſuppoſe, he conſidered his offer in this light; and what principally led him to propoſe it, was the great intereſt which he had with the king of Iſrael at that time, which he had merited by a ſignal ſervice; and as he had no views for himſelf, he thought it could not be employed ſo well as in eſtabliſhing the fortune of one, whoſe virtue might be ſo ſafely

truſte

truſted with it. It was a juſtifiable prepoſſeſſion in her favour,—though one not always to be relied on; for there is many a one who in a moderate ſtation, and with a leſſer degree of power, has behaved with honour and unblemiſhed reputation, and who has even borne the buffetings of adverſe fortune well, and manifeſted great preſence and ſtrength of mind under it, whom nevertheleſs a high exaltation has at once overcome, and ſo entirely changed, as if the party had left not only its virtue, but even himſelf behind him.

Whether the Shunamite dreaded to make this dangerous experiment of herſelf,—— or, which is more likely, that ſhe had learned to ſet bounds to her deſires, and was too well ſatisfied with her preſent condition to be tempted out of it, ſhe declines the offer in the cloſe of the text;—"I *dwell* amongſt mine own *people*;" as if ſhe had ſaid, "The intended kindneſs is far from being ſmall, but it is not uſeful to me; I live here, as thou art a witneſs, in peace, in a contented obſcurity;—not ſo high as to provoke envy, nor ſo low as to be trodden down and deſpiſed. In this ſafe and middle ſtate, as I have lived amongſt my own people, ſo let me die out of the reach, both of the cares and glories of the world.—— 'Tis fit, O holy man of GOD! that I learn ſome time or other to ſet bounds to my deſires; and if I cannot fix them now, when I have already more than my wants require, when ſhall I hope to do it?—Or how ſhould I expect that even this increaſe of honour or fortune would fully ſatisfy and content my ambition, ſhould I now give way to it?"

So engaging an inſtance of unaffected moderation and ſelf-denial, deſerves well to be conſidered by

by the buſtlers in this world;—becauſe, if we are to truſt the face and courſe of things, we ſcarce ſee any virtue ſo hard to be put in practice, and which the generality of mankind ſeem ſo unwilling to learn, as this of knowing when they have enough, and when it is time to give over their worldly purſuits.—Aye! but nothing is more eaſy, you will anſwer, than to fix this point and ſet certain bounds to it.—"For my own part, you will ſay, I declare, I want and would wiſh no more, but a ſufficient competency of thoſe things which are requiſite to the real uſes and occaſions of life, ſuitable to the way I have been taught to expect from uſe and education."—But recollect how ſeldom it ever happens, when theſe points are ſecured, but that new occaſions and new neceſſities preſent themſelves, and every day as you grow richer, freſh wants are diſcovered, which riſe up before you, as you aſcend the hill; ſo that every ſtep you take—every acceſſion to your fortune, ſet your deſires one degree further from reſt and ſatisfaction:—that ſomething you have not yet graſped, and poſſibly never ſhall;—that devil of a phantom unpoſſeſſed and unpoſſeſſable, is perpetually haunting you, and ſtepping in betwixt you and your contentment.—Unhappy creature! to think of enjoying that bleſſing without moderation!—or imagine that ſo ſacred a temple can be raiſed upon the foundation of wealth or power!—If the ground-work is not laid within your own mind, they will as ſoon add a cubit to your ſtature, as to your happineſs.—To be convinced it is ſo, pray look up to thoſe who have got as high as their warmeſt wiſhes could carry them in this aſcent, do you obſerve they live the better, the longer, the merrier,—or that they ſleep the ſounder in their beds, for having

ing twice as much as they wanted, or well know how to diſpoſe of?—Of all rules for calculating happineſs, this is the moſt deceitful, and which few but weak minds, and thoſe unpractiſed in the world too, ever think of applying as the meaſure in ſuch an eſtimation.——Great and inexpreſſible may be the happineſs, which a moderate fortune and moderate deſires, with a conſciouſneſs of virtue, will ſecure.—Many are the ſilent pleaſures of the honeſt peaſant, who riſes chearful to his labour;—why ſhould they not?—Look into his houſe, the ſeat of each man's happineſs; has he not the ſame domeſtic endearments,—the ſame joy and comfort in his children, and as flattering hopes of their doing well, to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the higheſt ſtation?—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true ſtate of his joy and ſufferings could be fairly balanced with thoſe of his betters, whether any thing would appear at the foot of the account, but what would recommend the moral of this diſcourſe.—This, I own, is not to be attained to, by the cynical ſtale trick of haranguing againſt the goods of fortune,—they were never intended to be talked out of the world.—But as virtue and true wiſdom lie in the middle of extremes,—on one hand, not to neglect and deſpiſe riches, ſo as to forget ourſelves; and on the other, not to purſue and love them ſo as to forget GOD;——to have them ſometimes in our heads,—but always ſomething more important in our hearts.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

ISAIAH i. 3.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib;—but Iſrael doth not know,—my people doth not conſider.

'TIS a ſevere but an affectionate reproach of the prophet's laid againſt the Iſraelites,—which may ſafely be applied to every heedleſs and unthankful people who are neither won by GOD's mercies, nor terrified by his puniſhments.—There is a giddy, thoughtleſs, intemperate ſpirit gone forth into the world, which poſſeſſes the generality of mankind;—and the reaſon the world is undone, is, becauſe the world does not conſider,—conſiders neither awful regard to GOD, nor the true relation themſelves bear to him.—Could they conſider this, and learn to weigh the cauſes, and compare the conſequences of things, and to exerciſe the reaſon which GOD has put into us for the government and direction of our lives,—there would be ſome hopes of a reformation:—but as the world goes, there is no leiſure for ſuch inquiries, and ſo full are our minds of other matters, that we have no time to aſk, or a heart to anſwer the queſtions we ought to put to ourſelves.

Whatever our condition is, 'tis good to be acquainted with it in time, to be able to ſupply what is wanting,—and examine the ſtate of our accounts,

accounts, before we come to give them up to an impartial judge.

The moſt inconſiderate ſee the reaſonableneſs of this,—there being few, I believe, either ſo thoughtleſs, or even ſo bad, but that they ſometimes enter upon this duty, and have ſome ſhort intervals of ſelf-examination which they are forced upon, if from no other motive, yet at leaſt to free themſelves from the load and oppreſſion of ſpirits they muſt neceſſarily be ſubject to without it.—But as the ſcripture frequently intimates,—and obſervation confirms it daily,—that there are many miſtakes attending the diſcharge of this duty,—I cannot make the remainder of this diſcourſe more uſeful, than by a ſhort inquiry into them. I ſhall therefore, firſt, beg leave to remind you of ſome of the many unhappy ways by which we often ſet about this irkſome taſk of examining our works, without being either the better or the wiſer for the employment.

And firſt, then, let us begin with that which is the foundation of almoſt all the other falſe meaſures we take in this matter,—that is, the ſetting about the examination of our works, before we are prepared with honeſt diſpoſitions to amend them.—This is beginning the work at the wrong end. Theſe previous diſpoſitions in the heart, are the wheels that ſhould make this work go eaſily and ſucceſsfully forwards,—and to take them off, and proceed without them, 'tis no miracle if like Pharaoh's chariots, they that drive them,—drive them heavily along.

Beſides, if a man is not ſincerely inclined to reform his faults,—'tis not likely he ſhould be inclined to ſee them,—nor will all the weekly preparations that ever were wrote, bring him nearer the point;—ſo that, with how ſerious a face

face ſoever he begins to examine,—he no longer does the office of an inquirer,—but an apologiſt, whoſe buſineſs is not to ſearch for truth,—but ſkilfully to hide it.—So long—therefore as this pre-engagement laſt betwixt the man and his old habits,—there is little proſpect of proving his works to any good purpoſe—of whatever kind they are, with ſo ſtrong an intereſt and power on their ſide.—As in other trials, ſo in this, 'tis no wonder if the evidence is puzzled and confounded, and the ſeveral facts and circumſtances ſo twiſted from their natural ſhapes, and the whole proof ſo altered and confirmed on the other ſide,—as to leave the laſt ſtate of that man even worſe than the firſt.

A ſecond unhappy, though general miſtake in this great duty of proving our works,—is that which the apoſtle hints at; in the doing it, not by a direct examination of our own actions, but from a comparative view of them, with the lives and actions of other men.

When a man is going to enter upon this work of ſelf-examination,—there is nothing ſo common, as to ſee him—look *round* him—inſtead of looking *within* him.—He looks round,—finds out ſome one who is more malicious,—ſees another that is more covetous, a third that is more proud and imperious than himſelf,—and ſo indirectly forms a judgment of himſelf, not from a review of his life, and a proving of his own works, as the apoſtle directs him, but rather from proving the works of others, and from their infirmities and defects drawing a deceitful concluſion in favour of himſelf.—In all competitions of this kind—one may venture to ſay, there will be ever ſo much of ſelf-love in a man, as to draw a flattering likeneſs of one of the parties—and 'tis well—if he has not ſo much malignity too, as

to

to give but a coarſe picture of the other,—— finiſhed with ſo many hard ſtrokes, as to make the one as unlike its original as the other.

Thus the phariſee, when he entered the temple,—no ſooner ſaw the publican, but that moment he formed the idea to himſelf of all the vices and corruptions that could poſſibly enter into the man's character,—and with great dexterity ſtated all his own virtues and good qualities over-againſt them. His abſtinence and frequent faſtings, exactneſs in the debts and ceremonies of the law; not balancing the account as he ought to have done, in this manner:—What though this man is a publican and a ſinner, have not I my vices as well as he? 'Tis true, his particular office expoſes him to many temptations of committing extortion and injuſtice;—but then—am not I a devourer of widows houſes and guilty of one of the moſt cruel inſtances of the ſame crime? He poſſibly is a profane perſon and may ſet religion at nought;—but do not I myſelf, for a pretence, make long prayers, and bring the greateſt of all ſcandals upon religion, by making it the cloak to my ambition and worldly views?—If he, laſtly, is debauched or intemperate—am not I conſcious of as corrupt and wanton diſpoſitions; and that a fair and guarded outſide is my beſt pretence to the oppoſite character.

If a man will examine his works by a comparative view of them with others,—this, no doubt, would be the fairer way, and leaſt likely to miſlead him.—But as this is ſeldom the method this trial is gone through—in fact it generally turns out to be as treacherous and deluſive to the man himſelf,—as it is uncandid to the man who is dragged into the compariſon; and whoever judges of himſelf by this rule,---ſo long as

there is no ſcarcity of vicious characters in the world,—'tis to be feared he will often take the occaſions of triumph and rejoicing,—where, in truth, he ought rather to be ſorry and aſhamed.

A third error in the manner of proving our works, is what we are guilty of, when we leave out of the calculation the only material parts of them;—I mean, the motives, and firſt principles from whence they proceeded. There is many a fair inſtance of generoſity, chaſtity, and ſelf-denial, which the world may give a man the credit of,—which, if he would give himſelf the leiſure to reflect upon, and trace back to their firſt ſprings—he would be conſcious proceeded from ſuch views and intentions as, if known, would not be to his honour.—The truth of this may be made evident by a thouſand inſtances in life;—and yet there is nothing more uſual than for a man, when he is going upon this duty of ſelf-examination,—inſtead of calling his own ways to remembrance,—to cloſe the whole enquiry at once, with this ſhort challenge;—"*That he de-*"*fies the world to ſay ill of him.*" If the world has no expreſs evidence, this indeed may be an argument of his good luck;—but no ſatisfactory one of the real goodneſs and innocence of his life.—A man may be a very bad man,—and yet, through caution,—through deep laid policy and deſign, may ſo guard our outward appearances, as never to want this negative teſtimony on his ſide,—*that the world knows no evil of him*,—how little ſoever he deſerves it. Of all aſſays upon a man's ſelf, this may be ſaid to be the ſlighteſt; this method of proving the goodneſs of our works—differing but little in kind from that unhappy one which many unwary people take in proving the goodneſs of their coin,—who, if it happens

to

to be ſuſpicious,—inſtead of bringing it either to the balance of the touch-ſtone to try its worth,——they ignorantly go forth; try if they can paſs it upon the world:——if ſo, all is well, and they are ſaved all the expence and pains of inquiring after and detecting the cheat.

A fourth error, in this duty of examination of men's works,—is that of committing the taſk to others;—an error in which thouſands of well-meaning creatures are inſnared in the Romiſh church, by her doctrines of auricular confeſſion, of works of ſupererogation, and the many lucrative practices raiſed upon that capital ſtock.——The trade of which is carried to ſuch a height in Popiſh countries, that if you was at Rome or Naples now, and was diſpoſed, in compliance with the apoſtle's exhortation in the text, to ſet about this duty, to prove your *own* works,---'tis great odds whether you will be ſuffered to do it yourſelf, without interruption; and you might be ſaid to have eſcaped well, if the firſt perſon you conſulted upon it did not talk you out of your reſolution, and poſſibly your ſenſes too at the ſame time.—Prove your works!—for heaven's ſake, deſiſt from ſo raſh an undertaking;—what!—truſt your own ſkill and judgment in a matter of ſo much difficulty and importance—when there are ſo many whoſe buſineſs it is,—who underſtand it ſo well, and who can do it for you with ſo much ſafety and advantage?

If your works muſt be proved, you would be adviſed, by all means, to ſend them to undergo this operation with ſome one who knows what he is about, either ſome expert and noted confeſſor of the church,—or to ſome convent or religious ſociety, who are in poſſeſſion of a large ſtock of good works of all kinds, wrought up by ſaints and

confeſſors, where you may ſuit yourſelf,—and either get the defects of your own ſupplied,—or be accommodated with new ones, ready proved to your hands, ſealed and certified to be ſo by the Pope's commiſſary, and the notaries of his eccleſiaſtic court. There needs little more to lay open this fatal error,—than barely to repreſent it. So I ſhall only add a ſhort remark,—that they who are perſuaded to be thus virtuous by proxy, and will prove the goodneſs of their works only by deputies,—will have no reaſon to complain againſt GOD's juſtice,—if he ſuffers them to go to heaven only in the ſame manner,—that is,—by deputies too.

The laſt miſtake which I ſhall have time to mention, is that which the Methodiſts have revived, for 'tis no new error—but one which has miſled thouſands before theſe days, whereever enthuſiaſm had got footing,—and that is—the attempting to prove their works by that very argument which is the greateſt proof of their weakneſs and ſuperſtition;—I mean that extraordinary impulſe and intercourſe with the ſpirit of GOD, which they pretend to, and whoſe operations (if you truſt them) are ſo ſenſibly felt in their hearts and ſouls, as to render at once all other proofs of their works needleſs to themſelves.—This, I own, is one of the moſt ſummary ways of proceeding in this duty of ſelf-examination, and as it proves a man's works in the groſs, it ſaves him a world of ſober thought and inquiry after many vexatious particulars.

Indeed, if the premiſes were true,—the inference is direct. For when a man dreams of theſe inward workings—and wakes with the impreſſion of them ſtrong upon his brain; 'tis not ſtrange he ſhould think himſelf a choſen veſſel,—ſanctifie

fied within, and ſealed up into the perfect day of redemption; and ſo long as ſuch a one is led captive to this error,———there is nothing in nature to induce him to this duty of examining his own works in the ſenſe of the prophet;——— for however bad they are,—ſo long as his credulity and enthuſiaſm equal them, 'tis impoſſible they ſhould diſturb his conſcience, or frighten him into a reformation. Theſe are ſome of the unhappy miſtakes in the many methods this work is ſet about,———which in a great meaſure rob us of the fruits we expected—and ſometimes ſo entirely blaſt them, that we are neither the better or wiſer for all the pains we have taken.

There are many other falſe ſteps which lead us the ſame way,—but the delineation of theſe, however, may ſerve, at preſent, not only as ſo many land-marks to guard us from this dangerous coaſt which I have deſcribed, but to direct us likewiſe into that ſafe one, where we can only expect the reward the goſpel promiſes. For if, according to the firſt recited cauſes, a man fails in examining his works, from a diſinclination to reform them,—from partiality of compariſons,—from flattery to his own motives, and a vain dependence upon the opinion of the world—the concluſion is unavoidable,—that he muſt ſearch for the qualities the moſt oppoſite to theſe for his conductors.—And if he hopes to diſcharge this work ſo as to have advantage from it,—that he muſt ſet out upon the principles of an honeſt head, willing to reform itſelf, and attached principally to that object, without regard to the ſpiritual condition of others, or the miſguided opinions which the world may have of himſelf.

That, for this end,—he muſt call his own ways to remembrance, and ſearch out his ſpirit;

—ſearch his actions, with the ſame critical exactneſs and the ſame piercing curioſity, we are wont to ſit in judgment upon others;—varniſhing nothing and diſguiſing nothing. If he proceeds thus, and in every relation of life takes a full view of himſelf without prejudice, traces his actions to their principles without mercy, and looks into the dark corners and receſſes of his heart without fear—and if upon ſuch an enquiry—he acts conſiſtent with his view in it, by reforming his errors, ſeparating the droſs, and purifying the whole maſs with repentance;—this will bid fair for examining a man's works in the apoſtle's ſenſe:—and whoever diſcharges the duty thus—with a view to ſcripture, which is the rule in this caſe—and to reaſon, which is the applier of this rule in all caſes—need not fear but he will have what the prophet calls *rejoicing in himſelf*, and that he will lay the foundation of his peace and comfort where it ought to lie—that is, within himſelf—in the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and the joyful expectation, that having done his utmoſt to examine his *own* works here, that GOD will accept them hereafter, through the merits of CHRIST; which GOD grant. *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON XV.

JOB's Expoſtulation with his Wife.

JOB ii. 10.

What!—ſhall we receive good at the hand of God, and ſhall we not receive evil alſo?

THESE are the words of Job, uttered in the depth of his misfortunes, by way of reproof to his wife, for the counſel we find ſhe had given him in the foregoing verſe; namely, not to retain his integrity any longer,—but to *curſe God and die.* Though it is not very evident, what was particularly meant and implied in the words —"Curſe GOD and die,"—yet it is certain, from Job's reply to them, that they directed him to ſome ſtep which was raſh and unwarrantable, and probably, as it is generally explained, meant that he ſhould openly call GOD's juſtice to an account, and by a blaſphemous accuſation of it, provoke GOD to deſtroy his being; as if ſhe had ſaid,—After ſo many ſad things which have befallen thee, notwithſtanding thy integrity, what gaineſt thou by ſerving GOD, ſeeing he bears thus hard upon thee, as though thou waſt his enemy?—Ought ſo faithful a ſervant as thou haſt been, to receive ſo unkind treatment at his hands;—and tamely to ſubmit to it?—patiently to ſuſtain the evils he had brought upon thy houſe, and neither murmur with thy lips, nor charge him with injuſtice?—bear it not thus;—and as

thy piety could not at firſt protect thee from ſuch misfortunes,—nor thy behaviour under them could ſince move GOD to take pity on thee;—change thy conduct towards him,—boldly expoſtulate with him,—upbraid him openly with unkindneſs,—call his juſtice and providence to an account for oppreſſing thee in ſo undeſerved a manner, and get that benefit by provoking him, which thou haſt not been able to obtain by ſerving him:—to die at once by his hands, and be freed, at leaſt, from the greater miſery of a lingering, and a more tormenting death.

On the other hand, ſome interpreters tell us,—that the word *curſe* in the original, is equivocal, and does more literally ſignify here, to bleſs, than to blaſpheme; and conſequently that the whole is rather to be conſidered as a ſarcaſtical ſcoff at Job's piety—As if it had been ſaid;—Go to,—bleſs GOD,—and die;—ſince thou art ſo ready to praiſe him in troubles as thou haſt done, go on in thy own way, and ſee how GOD will reward thee, by a miſerable death which thou canſt not avoid.

Without diſputing the merit of theſe two interpretations, it may not ſeem an improbable conjecture, that the words imply ſomething ſtill different from what is expreſſed in either of them:——and inſtead of ſuppoſing them as an incitement to blaſpheme GOD,—which was madneſs,—or that they were intended as an inſult, which was unnatural;—that her advice to curſe GOD and die, was meant here that he ſhould reſolve upon a voluntary death himſelf, which was an act not only in his power, but what carried ſome appearance of a remedy with it, and promiſed, at leaſt at firſt ſight, ſome reſpite from pain,

pain, as it would put an end, both to his life and his misfortunes together.

One may ſuppoſe, that with all the concern and affection which was natural, ſhe beheld her lord afflicted both with poverty and ſickneſs:---by one ſudden blow brought down from his palace to the dunghill.---In one mournful day, ſhe ſaw, that not only the fortunes of his houſe were blaſted, but likewiſe the hopes of his poſterity cut off for ever by the untimely loſs of his children.—She knew he was a virtuous and an upright man, and deſerved a better fate;—her heart bled the more for him,—ſhe ſaw the proſpect before him was dreadful,—that there appeared no poſſible means which could retrieve the ſad ſituation of his affairs;—that death, the laſt---the ſureſt friend to the unfortunate, could only ſet him free;—and that it was better to reſolve upon that at once, than vainly endeavour to wade through ſuch a ſea of troubles, which in the end would overwhelm him.—We may ſuppoſe her ſpirits ſinking under theſe apprehenſions, when ſhe began to look upon his conſtancy as a fruitleſs virtue, and from that perſuaſion, to have ſaid unto him,—Curſe GOD,—depend no longer upon him, nor wait the iſſues of his providence, which has already forſaken thee;—as there is no help from that quarter,—reſolve to extricate thyſelf—and ſince thou haſt met with no juſtice in this world,—leave it,—die—and force thy paſſage into a better country, where misfortunes cannot follow thee.

Whether this paraphraſe upon the words is juſt, or the former interpretations be admitted,—the reply in the next is equally proper;—What—ſhall we receive good at the hands of GOD, and ſhall we not receive evil alſo? Are not both

alike the diſpenſations of an all-wiſe and good Being, who knows and determines what is *beſt*? and wherefore ſhould I make myſelf the judge, to receive the one, and yet be ſo partial as to reject the other, when, by fairly putting both into the ſcale, I may be convinced how much the good outweighs the evil in all caſes; in my own, conſider how ſtrong this argument is againſt me.

In the beginning of my days, how did GOD crown me with honour? in how remarkable a manner did his providence ſet a hedge about me, and about all that I had on every ſide?—how he proſpered the works of my hands, ſo that our ſubſtance and happineſs encreaſed every day?

And now, when, for reaſons beſt known to his infinite wiſdom, he has thought fit to try me with afflictions,—ſhall I rebel againſt him in ſinning with my lips, and charging him fooliſhly?—GOD forbid.—O rather may I look up towards that hand which has bruiſed me,—for he maketh ſore and he bindeth up,—he woundeth, and his hands make whole; from his bounty only has iſſued all I had; from his wiſdom,—all I have loſt; for he giveth and he hath taken away,—bleſſed be his name.

There are few inſtances of particular virtue more engaging than thoſe of this heroic caſt; and if we may take the teſtimony of a Heathen philoſopher upon it, there is not an object in this world which GOD can be ſuppoſed to look down upon with greater pleaſure, than that of a good man involved in misfortunes, ſurrounded on all ſides with difficulties,—yet chearfully bearing up his head, and ſtruggling againſt them with firmneſs and conſtancy of mind.—Certainly to our conceptions ſuch objects muſt be truly engaging?—and the reaſon of ſo exalted an encomium,

mium from this hand is eaſy to be gueſſed: no doubt the wiſeſt of the Heathen philoſophers had found, from obſervation upon the life of man, that the many troubles and infirmities of his nature, the ſickneſſes, diſappointments, ſorrows for the loſs of children or property, with the numberleſs other calamities and croſs accidents to which the life of man is ſubject, were in themſelves ſo *great*,—and ſo *little* ſolid comfort to be adminiſtered from the mere refinements of philoſophy in ſuch emergencies, that there was no virtue which required greater efforts, or which was found ſo difficult to be atchieved upon moral principles; upon moral principles—which had no foundation to ſuſtain this great weight, which the infirmities of our nature laid upon it. And for this reaſon 'tis obſervable, that there is no ſubject upon which the moral writers of antiquity have exhauſted ſo much of their eloquence, or where they have ſpent ſuch time and pains, as in this of endeavouring to reconcile men to theſe evils. Inſomuch, that from thence in moſt modern languages, the patient enduring of afflictions has by degrees obtained the name of philoſophy, and almoſt monopolized the word to itſelf, as if it was the chief end or compendium of all the wiſdom which philoſophy had to offer. And indeed, conſidering what lights they had, ſome of them wrote extremely well: yet as what they ſaid proceeded more from the head than the heart, 'twas generally more calculated to ſilence a man in his troubles, than to convince, and teach him how to bear them. And therefore, however ſubtile and ingenious their arguments might appear in the reading, 'tis to be feared they loſt much of their efficacy, when tried in the application. If a man was thruſt back

back in the world by diſappointments, or—as was Job's caſe—had ſuffered a ſudden change in his fortunes; from an affluent condition was brought down by a train of cruel accidents, and pinched with poverty,—philoſophy would come in, and exhort him to ſtand his ground;—it would tell him, that the ſame greatneſs and ſtrength of mind, which enabled him to behave well in the days of his proſperity, ſhould equally enable him to behave well in the days of his adverſity;—that it was the property of only weak and baſe ſpirits, who were inſolent in the one, to be dejected and overthrown by the other; whereas great and generous ſouls were at all times calm and equal.—As they enjoyed the advantages of life with indifference,—they were able to reſign them with the ſame temper,—and conſequently,—were out of the reach of fortune. All which, however fine, and likely to ſatisfy the fancy of a man at eaſe, could convey but little conſolation to a heart already pierced with ſorrow;—nor is it to be conceived how an unfortunate creature ſhould any more receive relief from ſuch a lecture, however juſt, than a man racked with an acute fit of the gout or ſtone, could be ſuppoſed to be ſet free from torture, by hearing from his phyſician a nice diſſertation upon his caſe. The philoſophic conſolations in ſickneſs or in afflictions for the death of friends and kindred, were juſt as efficacious,—and were rather in general to be conſidered as good ſayings than good remedies.—So that, if a man was bereaved of a promiſing child, in whom all his hopes and expectations centered—or a wife was left deſtitute to mourn the loſs and protection of a kind and tender huſband, Seneca or Epictetus would tell the penſive parent and diſconſolate widow, that tears and lamentation for the dead were

fruitleſs

fruitleſs and abſurd;—that to die was the neceſſary and unavoidable debt of nature;—and as it could admit of no remedy—'twas impious and fooliſh to grieve and fret themſelves upon it. Upon ſuch ſage counſel, as well as many other leſſons of the ſame ſtamp, the ſame reflection might be applied, which is ſaid to have been made by one of the Roman emperors, to one who adminiſtered the ſame conſolations to him on a like occaſion—to whom, adviſing him to be comforted and make himſelf eaſy, ſince the event had been brought about by a fatality, and could not be helped,—he replied,—"That this was ſo "far from leſſening his trouble—that it was the "very circumſtance which occaſioned it." So that upon the whole,—when the true value of theſe, and many more of their current arguments have been weighed and brought to the teſt---one is led to doubt, whether the greateſt part of their heroes, the moſt renowned for conſtancy, were not much more indebted to good nerves and ſpirits, or the natural happy frame of their tempers, for behaving well, than to any extraordinary helps which they could be ſuppoſed to receive from their inſtructors. And therefore I ſhould make no ſcruple to aſſert, that one ſuch inſtance of patience and reſignation as this, which the ſcripture gives us in the perſon of Job; not of one moſt pompouſly declaiming upon the contempt of pain and poverty, but of a man ſunk in the loweſt condition of humanity,---to behold him, when ſtripped of his eſtate,——his wealth, his friends, his children,---chearfully holding up his head, and entertaining his hard fortune with firmneſs and ſerenity,——and this, not from a ſtoical ſtupidity, but a juſt ſenſe of GOD's providence, and a perſuaſion of his juſtice and goodneſs

neſs in all his dealing;——ſuch an example, I ſay, as this, is of more univerſal uſe, ſpeaks truer to the heart, than all the heroic precepts, which the pedantry of philoſophy has to offer.

This leads me to the point I aim at in this diſcourſe;——namely, that there are no principles but thoſe of religion to be depended on in caſes of real ſtreſs, and that theſe are able to encounter the worſt emergencies, and to bear us up under all the changes and chances to which our life is ſubject.

Conſider then what virtue the very firſt principle of religion has, and how wonderfully it is conducive to this end; That there is a GOD, a powerful, a wiſe and good Being, who firſt made the world; and continues to govern it;——by whoſe goodneſs all things are deſigned——and by whoſe providence all things are conducted to bring about the greateſt and beſt ends. The ſorrowful and penſive wretch that was giving way to his misfortunes, and mournfully ſinking under them, the moment this doctrine comes into his aid, huſhes all his complaints---and thus ſpeaks comfort to his ſoul,—"It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good:—without his direction I know that no evil can befall me;—without his permiſſion, that no power can hurt me;—it is impoſſible a being ſo wiſe ſhould miſtake my happineſs—or that a being ſo good ſhould contradict it. If he has denied me riches or other advantages,—perhaps he foreſees the gratifying my wiſhes would undo me, and by my own abuſe of them be perverted to my ruin.—If he has denied me the requeſt of children,—or in his providence has thought fit to take them from me——how can I ſay—whether he has not dealt kindly with me, and only taken that away which he

he foreſaw would embitter and ſhorten my days. —It does ſo, to ten thouſands, where the diſobedience of a thankleſs child has brought down the parent's grey hairs with ſorrow to the grave. Has he viſited me with ſickneſs, poverty or other diſappointments?——can I ſay, but theſe are bleſſings in diſguiſe?——ſo many different expreſſions of his care and concern, to diſintangle my thoughts from this world, and fix them upon another,——another, a better world beyond this"——This thought opens a new ſcene of hope and conſolation to the unfortunate; ——and as the perſuaſion of a providence reconciles him to the evils he has ſuffered,—this proſpect of a future life gives him ſtrength to deſpiſe them, and eſteem the light afflictions of his life, as they are not worthy to be compared to what is reſerved for him hereafter.

Things are great or ſmall by compariſon—— and he who looks no further than this world, and balances the accounts of his joys and ſufferings from that conſideration, finds all his ſorrows enlarged, and at the cloſe of them will be apt to look back, and caſt the ſame ſad reflection upon the whole which the patriarch did to Pharaoh,—— "That few and evil had been the days of his "pilgrimage." But let him lift up his eyes towards heaven, and ſteadfaſtly behold the life and immortality of a future ſtate,—he then wipes away all tears from off his eyes for ever and ever; —like the exiled captive, big with the hopes that he is returning home,——he feels not the weight of his chains, or counts the days of his captivity; but looks forward with rapture towards the country where his heart is fled before.

Theſe are the aids which religion offers us towards the regulating of our ſpirit under the evils of

of life :——but like great cordials,——they are ſeldom uſed but on greater occurrences.——In the leſſer evils of life we ſeem to ſtand unguarded———and our peace and contentment are overthrown, and our happineſs broke in upon by a little impatience of ſpirit under the croſs and untoward accidents we meet with.——These ſtand unprovided for, and we neglect them as we do the ſlighter indiſpoſitions of the body—which we think not worth treating ſeriouſly—and ſo leave them to nature. In good habits of the body this may do,—and I would gladly believe, there are ſuch good habits of the temper,—ſuch a complexional eaſe and health of heart, as may often ſave the patient much medicine.—— We are ſtill to conſider—that however ſuch good frames of mind are got—they are worth preſerving by all rules—patience and contentment,—which, like the treaſure hid in the field, for which a man ſold all he had to purchaſe—is of that price, that it cannot be had at too great a purchaſe, ſince, without it, the beſt condition in life cannot make us happy,—and with it, it is impoſſible we ſhould be miſerable even in the worſt.—Give me leave, therefore, to cloſe this diſcourſe with ſome reflections upon the ſubject of a contented mind—and the duty in man of regulating his ſpirit, in our way through life;—a ſubject in every body's mouth—preached upon daily to our friends and kindred———but too oft in ſuch a ſtyle, as to convince the party lectured only of this truth;—that we bear the misfortunes of others with excellent tranquillity.

I believe there are thouſands ſo extravagant in their ideas of contentment, as to imagine that it muſt conſiſt in having every thing in this world turn out the way they wiſh—that they are to ſit down

down in happineſs, and feel themſelves ſo at eaſe at all points, as to deſire nothing better and nothing more. I own there are inſtances of ſome, who ſeem to paſs through the world as if all their paths had been ſtrewed with roſe-buds of delight;—but a little experience will convince us, 'tis a fatal expectation to go upon.—We are born to trouble; and we may depend upon it, whilſt we live in this world, we ſhall have it, though with intermiſſions,—that is, in whatever ſtate we are, we ſhall find a mixture of good and evil; and the true way therefore to contentment is, to know to receive theſe certain viciſſitudes of life,—the returns of good and evil, ſo as neither to be exalted by the one, or overthrown by the other; but to bear ourſelves, towards every thing which happens with ſuch eaſe and indifference of mind, as to hazard as little as may be. This is the true temperate climate fitted for us by nature, and in which every wiſe man would wiſh to live.—GOD knows, we are perpetually ſtraying out of it, and by giving wings to our imaginations, in the tranſports we dream of, from ſuch or ſuch a ſituation in life, we are carried away alternately into all the extremes of hot and cold, for which, as we are neither fitted by nature, or prepared by expectation, we feel them with all their violence, and with all their danger too.

GOD, for wiſe reaſons, has made our affairs in this world almoſt as fickle and capricious as ourſelves.——Pain and pleaſure, like light and darkneſs, ſucceed each other; and he that knows how to accommodate himſelf to their periodical returns, and can wiſely extract the good from the evil,—knows only how to live;—this is true contentment, at leaſt all that is to be had of it in this world, and for this every man muſt be indebted

not

not to his fortune but to himſelf.—And, indeed, it would have been ſtrange, if a duty ſo becoming us as dependent creatures—and ſo neceſſary beſides to all our well-beings, had been placed out of the reach of any in ſome meaſure to put in practice—and for this reaſon, there is ſcarce any lot ſo low, but there is ſomething in it to ſatisfy the man whom it has befallen: providence having ſo ordered things, that in every man's cup, how bitter ſoever, there are ſome cordial drops——ſome good circumſtances, which, if wiſely extracted, are ſufficient for the purpoſe he wants them,———that is to make him contented, and if not happy, at leaſt reſigned. May GOD bleſs us all with this ſpirit, for the ſake of JESUS CHRIST. *Amen.*

END OF VOL. II.